







## **INDIAN CAVALCADE**



**BY THE SAME AUTHOR**

***The Golden Boat*** (Translations from Rabindranath Tagore)

***Some Memorable Yesterdays***

***So Many Hungers!*** (A novel)

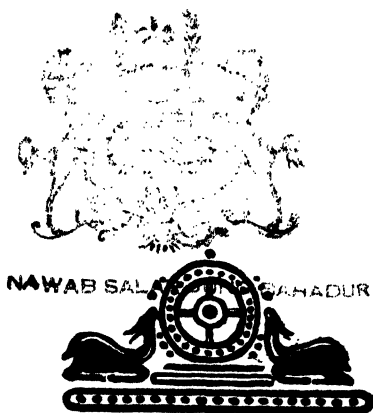
# INDIAN CAVALCADE

*(SOME MEMORABLE YESTERDAYS)*

BY

BHABANI BHATTACHARYA

Ph.D. (Lond.)



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*For*  
**ARJUN**

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I have used some passages from standard works of translation of the chronicles of old. I record my acknowledgments.

I must add a word of regret. Some essential link in the material had to be left out on copyright grounds, so that there are odd blanks in the panoramic picture.

B. B.

May 1948.

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## KING VIKRAM, THE GLORY OF UJJAINI

**T**HE riddle of the *Vikram samvat* that has passed its two thousandth year will never be solved unless there comes to light some startling new record embodied in stone. All we know is that it had its origin in 57 or 58 B. C. in Malava land of which Ujjaini was the capital. However, tradition—the temple of race memory that is less perishable than stone—strangely ascribes the *samvat* to a monarch who lived four centuries later, Chandragupta II, Vikramaditya. A lesser Vikram—many kings have styled themselves the Sun of Power—might have started the era, though there are reasons to believe that in 57 B. C. Azas I, a Saka chieftain, was Malava's ruler. And then the era is said to commemorate the expulsion of the alien Sakas from Ujjaini, a feat performed, we know, by none other than Chandragupta II.

Tradition paid its ultimate homage to one of India's greatest Emperors by building round him a web of romance, a cycle of legend, and ascribing to him an era that had begun long before. What if in this telescopic process it made mock of historical time? Chronology can well become an obsession! What matter if an event of prime national importance was hung, like a decoration, to the glittering name of one who deserved this unique honour never to be repeated?



That might have been the unresolved secret of Vikram samvat. Or it might not.

Vikramaditya himself was more than an individual, more than Chandragupta II ; he was a symbol of the spirit of his times. The earth-image of Chandragupta II dwindled into ash ; the symbol lived on in mystic lore.

A brief glance at his historical roots would make vivid the great fruit-gathering of his age that has had such an imaginative hold on the later Indian mind.

Vedic India, Aryanized, settling down from nomadic life, ceased to pour out its spirit to the beauty and wonder of the gods that were Nature, and found increasing self-expression in deep speculative thought, centred on the shackling chain of birth and death and rebirth and, beyond the chain, the One Ultimate Reality. It is a far cry from the simple songs of the *Rig-Veda* to the wistful brooding, "What good to me is that which shall not win me immortality?" and the restful realising, "*Tat tvam Asi.*" Rishis like Yajnavalkya and Kapila loom large through the mists of time—towering figures, as great in their way as the Buddha himself. The Upanishads multiplied, building up philosophic values through mystic introspection, a spiritual heritage that cast an aureole of glory around Brahmanism for all centuries to come.

And the Buddha rose, and he gleaned the old truths and added to them his own creative vision. "One thing alone I teach, O monks—sorrow and the uprooting of sorrow." And he taught the secret of Nirvana. But, radiant through his mystic revelation was his ethical ideal : love, compassion, non-attachment. A tide of spiritual hunger swept over Brahmavarta. Saffron-clad Buddhist monks began to walk the land, feeding the great hunger, spreading the message of the Enlightened One. Onward to Asoka ! Buddhism became the national reli-

gion and developed international significance. Indian culture, having journeyed over the sunlit Vedic heights and absorbed their dazzle, pressed on to the summit of a second great peak, where it was humanized, softened with compassion, with Ahimsa, with reverence for the earth-forms of life.

Not the least of the social values of the new "heresy" was its equalitarian spirit, and the concrete expression of that spirit in the uniformity of judicial procedure, abolition of the Brahman's immunity from the hand of justice.

Brahman reaction came fast. As peace and goodwill, the ideal of Mauryan moulding, bent, broke, under the hammering of foreign invasion, the Brahman priest Pushyamitra Sunga wrested power from the king's trembling hands, exchanged *shastra* for *sastra*, and made war on the Yavanas (Greeks), even as earlier Brahmans had fought the troops of Alexander the Great. The story of the Greek invader Menander who threatened Pataliputra and was subsequently converted to Buddhism by Nagasena is recorded in the Pali work *Milinda Panha* (Questions of Menander) which gives a vivid account of the Greek king and his dialectic disputations with the Buddhist teacher. The inscription on the Besnagar Pillar—"The Greek Heleodorus adopted the Hindu religion and erected this monument in honour of the deity Krishna-Vasudeva"—records Sunga's conquest of the invading Greeks not in the military sense alone. The Greeks settling down in the land they had hoped to conquer became Indianized and were assimilated in Hindu society. This was the beginning of the process by which Hinduism grew into an absorbent of startling capacity. The early signs of this cultural fusion appeared in the realm of art. Hellenic ideals lent their lines to the so-called Gandhara sculpture. Now the figure of Sakya-

muni, depicted for the first time (In previous sculptural portrayal of the Buddha's life symbols such as the Bo-tree, the Lotus, footprints, the Wheel of the Law and so forth told of the presence of the Blessed One), had the curious composition of a Greek Apollo in semi-Indian garb.

New tides of invasion, sweeping with relentless fury, broke the power of the Brahman rulers of Magadha, Sakas, Pahlavas, Kushanas. Yet the feet of intellectual progress never faltered. Two great harvests were ripening side by side. One, the Buddhist, produced *Saddharma-pundarika* and *Milinda Panha* and the works of Asvaghosa and the brilliant Brahman bhikshu Nagarjuna. The other, the Brahman, bore the sustaining crop of the Epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*—perhaps a thousand years passed between their seedtime and their harvesting—and the *Mahabharata's* glorious appendix, the *Gita*, with its comprehensive philosophy of life.

In the secular sphere, out of the dark waters of endless war rose Kanishka, a Kushan soldier who became a great Buddhist, while, inspired by a sense of inquiry, he showed his interest also in Hinduism and in Zoroastrianism. The two significant features that marked the Kanishkan age of transition were, first, that Hellenisation of Indian culture reached the top of the inclined plane and was soon to slide downward, and, secondly, that Buddhism made rapid strides deep into China, and there began close cultural communion between China and India. The Hindu concept of Bhakti coloured the Buddhist craving for Mukti and the two faiths edged nearer each other than ever before.

So the scene was set for King Vikram, symbol of a great renaissance comparable to the age of Pericles in Greece, the T'ang regime in China, the Elizabethan age

in England. Religion and literature—two aspects of one spiritual impulse—had prepared the mind of the people for an Awakening. Leadership alone was needed. And leadership came. The Gupta kings, the greatest of whom passed into legend as Vikramaditya (though he was not much more responsible for the renaissance of his age than were Queen Elizabeth and even King Li Shih-min for theirs), flung the foreigners, the Western Satraps, out of their wedge in Malava, won the country back its long-lost peace, unity and benevolent administration, and Vikramaditya performed the *Asvamedha* ceremony to establish his status as King of Kings.

The Noble Eightfold Path had served its historic purpose as an instrument of the Crown. A new orientation was needed to preserve the face of Aryavarta from the ruthless assault of barbarian hordes. And the inspiration came from the *Gita*, from the utterance of Krishna : “ When unrighteousness prevails I am born among men.” Sword in one hand and the *Gita* in the other (even if the *Gita*’s endorsement of the violence of war is more apparent, more symbolistic, than real) Chandragupta II made war on the greed-ridden aliens who imperilled his country’s freedom, concluding the task so valiantly started by his father Samudragupta. But for the military prowess of these two monarchs, there would have been no political unity in Aryavarta, and the forces working for a new life, a new golden age, would have been in vain.

The nerve-centre of the new life shifted from Pataliputra to Ujjaini, “ painted ornament of India, earth’s fair cheek,” with its history of a thousand years. Here Asoka had ruled as viceroy before he assumed the crown of Magadha. Here three great trade-routes met, and all the streams of art, religion, culture. Here, under Vikram’s enlightened statesmanship, the “ Nine Gems ” cast

their radiance, among them the poet Kalidas, the astronomer Varahamihira, the lexicographer Amarasinaka, the architect Amaravisha.

Kalidas in his *Cloud Messenger* has made vivid the fulfilments of a people who had known centuries of storm. His ecstatic account, with its emphasis on beauty and material splendour, is well supplemented by the calm narration of a strange traveller from China, Fa-Hian, who made a pilgrimage to the land of his Master. Driven by his urge, the brave devotee had passed out of Central China into the perils of the Gobi Desert and the hardships of crossing the Himalayan heights. Across Khotan and the Pamirs and Gandhara into Purushapura (Peshawar). Down the Land of the Five Rivers, Mathura, Kanauj, Kasi, Kushinagar, Pataliputra. At Pataliputra he stayed for three years, learning Sanskrit. Wonder filled his eyes as he saw the majesty of Asoka's palace, five centuries old. Though his account was based on his absorbing quest of Buddhist manuscripts and relics, he turned his eyes occasionally on the masses of the people. They, he said, "vied with one another in the practice of benevolence and righteousness." "Throughout the land the people abstain from taking life and drinking wine, and there are no wine-shops in the market places." The criminal law was mild. Corporal punishment was seldom inflicted. The capital penalty was almost unknown. Buddhism and Hinduism flourished side by side. The King was a *Paramabhagvata* (Inscriptions also make use of this epithet as well as Maharajadhiraja-Sri-Bhattaraka, while his coins describe him as Vikramaditya, Vikramanka, Sinha-Vikrama, etc.), a devout worshipper of Vishnu and His incarnation Krishna ; but there was religious liberty for all, respect for every faith.

Fa-Hian, however, seems to have had no vision of the

historic forces that were now making for the extinction of Buddhism in the land of its origin. Many Brahmins had entered the sangha as monks, holding deep within them the legacy of the Hindu tradition. The Mahayana school was a compromise that carried a toxin of self-elimination. On the other hand, Hinduism with its marvellous resilience had absorbed many elements of Buddhist teaching and adopted the Enlightened One as one of its own gods, one of the ten avatars, so that Buddhism became a single point of light in a vast lit chandelier, and was needless as a separate entity, untenable.

And all this while Pali, the old vehicle of Buddhist thought, was yielding ground to Sanskrit, the sacred language of the Brahmins. The development of Sanskrit through the perfection of its grammar set the pace of the classic age of Hindu literature. The works of Kalidas were but the keystone of a great arch that curved in immortal splendour.

The great efflorescence found further form in the evolution of the six Darshanas, systems of philosophy. While some parts of them were fixed on the high plane of theory, other parts descended and soaked into the lives of the people, into their thoughts and traditions and culture.

Painting, too, drew colour from the new life. Some of the finest works of Ajanta, a great stride forward from earlier specimens, belonged to this period. E. B. Havell has written :—

“Hindu artists reshaped the crude imaginings of the Gandharan school according to the traditional concepts of Brahman Philosophy. The divine Buddha was no longer portrayed in the guise of an Indo-Roman monk but as the Buddhist counterpart of Siva, the perfect Yogi of India, or as an avatar of Vishnu. Thus Buddhism

outwardly and inwardly was transformed by Brahman thinkers."

Nalanda, the great University of this age, remained like Ajanta a stronghold of the Buddhist Way. But even as the artists of Ajanta revealed Hindu ideals in their creative striving, the monks under the tiled roofs of Nalanda, passing on their knowledge to eager pupils from all over India and from abroad, conveyed in their teaching many basic elements of Hindu philosophy. The Vedas, indeed, ranked high in the Nalanda curriculum.

The intellectual tide of the times, it must be noted, reached over beyond philosophy and literature, beyond painting and sculpture, into the colder realms of medicine and science. The decimal system of notation, Algebra and Chemistry were early fruits of Hindu investigation, passed on into Europe many centuries after by Arab scholars. The process of transmission, however, had its start in the age of Vikram and was directed toward the South of Asia and the Far East. A repetition, in a way, of Asokan times, but on a more comprehensive scale, for the era was like an enormous vase that was brimful, overflowing. Ananda Coomaraswamy has rightly claimed:—

"Almost all that belongs to the common spiritual consciousness of Asia, the ambient in which its diversities are reconcilable, is of Indian origin in the Gupta period."

The people of India today, torn and unhappy at the close of two thousand years of their oldest samvat, cast wistful eyes upon their past fulfilments, upon the golden age of Asoka and the golden age of Vikram, and these splash them with wonder and lend them their dreams.

## THE ARAB STORM

**T**HE Arabs were the first Muslim invaders of the Indus valley, their tempestuous onrush part of a far-flung scheme of world-conquest. The advent of Muhammad had marked a turning-point in Bedouin history. The Prophet had created a new Faith as well as a new spirit of adventure. But the long-prevailing idea that his teachings supplied the motive and energy for Bedouin expansion, for a Greater Arabia movement, cannot be endorsed. It seems to me that Arab world-conquest would have come about even if the Prophet had never been born. Its motive was more economic than religious. The naked deserts had bred a fierce, bold race, seething with virility and vigour, rapidly multiplying their species, riding their horses in reckless gallop over the hot sands, struggling to earn a living. The Prophet made them conscious of their strength. And he gave them a sword of stainless steel. The world was theirs to conquer. Why, then, should they live in poverty, facing starvation on barren lands? So it happened that the tall men of the desert emerged from their homes and set out in hunger and greed. Islam was a convenient banner and a battle-cry. A moment before they had been fighting among themselves. Now they forgot their petty jealousies and feuds, called each other brother, and with the cry of *Allaho Akbar* fell in fury upon a world that was hostile and heathen. The sword they named "the key of heaven and hell."



Killing, they became *Ghazis*. Dying, they attained bliss. And their victims, one and all, journeyed ghost-like to the nether world!

Spreading terror and devastation the Arab hordes within twenty years became masters of Syria, Palestine, Egypt and Persia. They attained splendid success everywhere. Trampling over the bodies of the vanquished, restlessly marching, they overran Ferghana, Bokhara and Samarkand. But the icy walls of the Hindukush stopped their progress eastward. Tall, white-mantled sentinels barred the way.

Meanwhile the Arabs faced West, stormed over Northern Africa and broke the back of Gothic Spain in the battle of Guadalata.

Under the Khalifa Umar, who was second in succession to the Prophet, Arab pirates crossed over to the coasts of India, near Bombay, and plundered those parts. But Umar had a horror of the sea, which had been described to him as a "great pool that some senseless people furrow, looking like worms upon logs of wood". So he prohibited naval expeditions on heavy penalties. Arabia, after all, could ill afford to waste its man-power on fruitless fields.

Under the next Khalifa Mu'awiya the prohibition was relaxed and expeditions were permitted and even encouraged to some extent. But it was only when Al Hajji, a cruel tyrant and imperialist to the core, became Governor of Iraq and Persia that Hindustan began to loom large on the map of Arab military ambition.

An incident gave Al Hajjaj his opportunity. The King of the Isle of Rubies (that was Ceylon—so named, as the chronicler Al Biladuri tells us, "because of the beauty of the women") sent him vessels full of valuable presents, including slave-girls. At Debal on the coast of Sind, pirates fell upon the ships and plundered them.

When Al Hajjaj heard the news he sent an envoy to Dahir, the King of Sind, demanding reparations. Dahir replied that he had no authority over pirates.

The Governor of Iraq vowed vengeance, but the Khalifa was unwilling to send an expedition to India. "The distance is great," he wrote to his Governor, "the requisite expenditure will be enormous, and I do not wish to expose the lives of Musalmans to peril."

The eager remonstrances of Al Hajjaj, however, prevailed at last upon the Khalifa Walid I, and a punitive expedition marched out into Hindustan. It failed, and the General who led it lost his life. This was unbearable humiliation and shame for Islam. Al Hajjaj began to work hard on a second, better equipped expedition. It may be noted that at this very moment the forces of Islam were subjugating Spain and attacking the frontiers of France.

The leadership of this important expedition was entrusted to a youth of seventeen named Muhammad Kasim. Astrologers had been consulted, and they had indicated him as the right man for the task. But the real cause of the appointment was probably the fact that he was the cousin of Al Hajjaj. Later, he became his son-in-law.

There could not have been a better selection. Muhammad Kasim was a gallant, dashing Prince who understood the technique of war and believed in stern discipline. He started with six thousand picked Syrian and Iraqi horsemen clad in armour, an equal number of camel-riders, numerous other soldiers and a baggage-train of three thousand camels. He was amply provided with all that he could possibly need during his sojourn, even thread and needles.

On a certain Friday early in the spring of 712 A.D. Muhammad Kasim arrived at Debal, the great port of

the Indus valley and forerunner of Karachi. Here ships brought him a further supply of men, arms and five great catapults together with the necessary ammunition. (The catapult was then the equivalent of the howitzer of to-day). He dug entrenchments defended by spearmen and unfurled his banners. A great catapult known as the "Bride" which had been used by the Prophet himself (unlike other Prophets the creator of Islam was well versed in the "art" of war) and had been successfully employed at Damascus and in North Africa, was one of the main instruments in hand. No less than five hundred men were needed to work this mighty machine.

Debal was taken by storm in the first week of May, and there followed the usual carnage in which many Brahmins were butchered. A Mahomedan quarter was laid out and a mosque built. Having won the gateway to the Indus valley, the victorious General marched up the river bank to meet the main body of his enemy.

The history of the foreign conquest of Hindustan is a history of the people's criminal disunion. The last instance of that disunion is to be found in the annals of the British occupation of the country. And what was probably its first example is to be traced back through the maze of centuries to the time when Saracen spears glinted ominously on the Indus valley. The Jats and the Meds who formed a considerable part of the population of Sind went over to the invaders.

The *Chach Nama* records the treachery of a chief named Kaka Kotal. He persuaded his followers to go over to the Arabs. "It is predicted upon astronomical calculation," he argued, "that Hindustan shall be taken by the Muhammadans, and I also believe that this will come to pass." And he went to Muhammad Kasim and

said, "Be firm upon all circumstances and set your mind at ease. You will overcome them. I make my submission to you, and I will be your counsellor, and assist you to the extent of my power. I will be your guide in overpowering and subduing your enemies."

Fifty thousand soldiers crossed the Indus over a bridge of boats and encountered the Hindu army. On the eve of battle the commander of King Dahir's advance guard went over to the enemy!

Five days the battle raged. Dahir's fall at last decided the issue. The King was leading his army from the back of an elephant. A skilful Arab archer, directed by his General, drew his bow and shot a naphtha arrow into Dahir's howda, setting it ablaze. Another arrow struck the King on the chest. Dahir reeled and fell to the ground but quickly raised himself—only to confront a scowling Saracen warrior who "struck him with a sword on the very centre of his head, and cleft it to his neck." A deadly desperate fight then developed, but the Hindu ranks broke in confusion before the fierce onslaught.

It was an evil day in the fortress of Rewar, where pale helpless women awaited death and dishonour. In this crisis, Rani Bai, the brave wife of Dahir, showed the sterling qualities of Indian womanhood. She gathered the remnants of the army and challenged the besiegers at the walls below with a shower of stones, arrows and javelins. But it was of no avail. When the bastions came down and the fortress was about to be taken, Rani Bai assembled the women of the royal household and said, "Muhammad Kasim is come....Our honour would be lost. Our respite is at an end, and there is nowhere any hope of escape; let us collect wood, cotton and oil, for we should burn ourselves and go to meet our husbands.

If any wish to save herself she may." And they went into a house, set it on fire and burnt themselves. Then the Muslims stormed into the fort. Muhammad put six thousand captives to the sword, and shot down many more with arrows. Some thirty thousand prisoners still remained, and these were made into slaves. Among the captured were thirty women of high descent including two daughters of Dahir.

The various accounts of the invasion do not mention how the "two virgin daughters" of Dahir escaped the fire of self-immolation lit by their mother Rani Bai and fell into Arab hands. That will probably never be explained. Veils were put on their faces and they were placed in charge of Abyssinian attendants. In a while they were sent away to the Khalifa as presents.

A dismal procession flanked by armed horsemen wended its way across the frontiers of Sind and took the road to Iraq. The road was rough and the men were hungry and tired. Their life as human beings was at an end. Henceforth they would be little better than beasts. Most of these five thousand slaves would be sold at international slave markets; a few would be kept by the Khalifa and the other great ones of the Empire of Islam.

There were women in the procession, images from temples, great heaps of gold, precious stones and jewels. Above all, there was a severed head!

Al Hajjaj, the Governor of Iraq, was delighted to see the head of Dahir, erstwhile King of Sind and Hind. He forwarded it along with a part of the booty and the prisoners to his master at Baghdad. Then a curious thing happened, one that has all the strangeness of fiction.

When King Dahir's captive daughters arrived at the capital they were sent into the Khalifa's harem. Two

months later, the Khalifa Walid I remembered the two "Hindi slaves," and ordered them to be brought to him. An interpreter summoned them. When their veils were thrown back the Khalifa was struck with amazement at their beauty. Through the interpreter he asked the girls their names. One said her name was Parmal Devi; the other was Suraj Devi. The Khalifa called Suraj Devi to him. When he laid his hand upon her and drew her towards him, she cried, "Long live the Khalifa! I am not worthy of the Khalifa's bed because the just Commander Muhammad Kasim kept us three days near himself before he sent us to the royal residence. Perhaps it is a custom among you; but such ignominy should not be suffered by kings."

When the interpreter explained the words, anger and jealousy leapt up in Walid's heart. He asked for ink and paper and forthwith wrote a letter to Muhammad Kasim, commanding that he should let himself be sewed up in a hide and sent to the capital.

When Muhammad Kasim received the letter, he at once complied with the order, and sewn up in a raw hide he died of suffocation. As the corpse arrived at the palace, the Khalifa proudly summoned the captive princesses. And the elder one put off the veil from her face and addressed the Khalifa thus: "May the king be adorned with perfect wisdom. It is proper that a king should test with the touchstone of reason what he hears from friend or foe. Your orders have been obeyed, but your gracious mind is wanting in reason and judgment. Muhammad Kasim respected our honour, and he never touched us, your slaves, with a licentious hand. But he had killed the king of Hind and Sind, he had destroyed the dominion of our forefathers, and degraded us from the dignity of royalty to a state of slavery. To revenge

these injuries, we uttered a falsehood before the Khalifa, and our object has been fulfilled."

The Khalifa bit his hand in a spasm of fury. And the Hindu princess went on: "The king has committed a very grievous mistake ! For two more slave girls he has destroyed a person who ruined a hundred thousand modest women like us, who brought down seventy chiefs of Hind and Sind!"

And the wrathful Kalifa punished the two daughters of King Dahir by having them buried alive between walls.

## A QUEEN'S DILEMMA

“**A** GREAT sovereign she was, and sagacious, just, beneficent, a patron of the learned, a disposer of justice, a cherisher of her subjects, of warlike talent, endowed with all the admirable attributes of a king.” So wrote a contemporary chronicler about Raz-  
yia, the eldest daughter and successor of Iltutmish, who was the real founder of the Pathan dynasty at Delhi. And the chronicler added (with a sour smile, perhaps, mingled with a sigh): “But as she did not attain the destiny, in her creation, of being computed among men, of what advantage were all these excellent qualifications to her?”

Her father, the Sultan, used to say that though cast in the form of a woman she was in reality a man. Later, as sovereign of the Delhi kingdom, she played the king with marvellous courage and skill. She abandoned female garments and emerged out of the zenana, unblushing, unself-conscious, her lovely body a heavy-shaded candelabra, her dark-flowing curls hidden under a man's head-dress. She sat unveiled in the open *darbar*, heedless of the thousand eyes that rested on her face, and transacted with the skill of a born ruler the intricate business of government. She rode on an elephant, rode down the surging curiosity-haunted, acid-tongued streets. Men saw her, thoughtfully fingered their beards and winked at each other. Women gaped, with horror in their eyes, and slowly their hearts became wells of poison. Raz-  
yia rode on, resplendent,



noting the conditions of her people, planning improvements; or else she marched on horseback in the van of her army, aiming thrusts at her numerous enemies. Her imagination worked as vigorously in war as in peace.

Yet Queen Razyia was a woman of strange passions, and her love for an Abyssinian slave attached to the palace cost her the Delhi throne.

When Sultan Iltutmish (the builder of the Kutb Minar) nominated her heiress in preference to his sons, the unconventional act gave rise to a storm of protest. The ministers made anxious representations. "Inasmuch as His Majesty has grown-up sons who are eligible for the sovereignty, what scheme and what object has the Sultan of Islam in view in making a daughter sovereign and heir-apparent? Be pleased to remove this difficulty from our minds as this deed does not seem advisable to your humble servants."

The Sultan, it is recorded in the *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*, replied thus: "My sons are engrossed in the pleasures of youth, and none of them possesses the capacity of managing the affairs of the country, and by them the government of the kingdom will not be carried out. After my death it will be seen that not one of them will be found more worthy to be heir-apparent than she, my daughter."

Not that the sovereignty of women was unprecedented in the annals of Islam. Even in the same century there were Muslim queens ruling in Egypt and Persia. But the youth of Razyia was against her. Then again, during her father's life-time she had lived in seclusion. (The statement to be found in some history books that Razyia's father had reared her up as a boy is certainly guesswork and probably romance; it is disproved by evidence in the *Tabqat-i-Nasiri*). So the nobles at the Delhi Court set

aside the succession and placed Prince Ruknuddin, a son of Iltutmish, on the throne.

The dead Sultan had not acted unwisely. It was soon clear that Ruknuddin was unfit to rule. He was a debauchee of the worst kind, living only for his enjoyments. Handsome, generous, open-hearted, foolish, fond of buffoons, and vulgar. Life was to him a merry-go-round of pleasures and more pleasures. He was extravagant: seated on an elephant, dead drunk, he would drive through the bazaars of Delhi, scattering *tankas* of gold. The government was left in the hands of his mother, Shah Turkan, a woman embittered at once by an inferiority complex and an inordinate ambition. Neglected by her husband, she had grown ugly with black jealousy. Holding now the whip of power, she wreaked vengeance on the other wives of her dead husband, torturing them and even putting a few to death. Then she cruelly blinded a stepson of hers, a youth of much promise, and had him slain.

This murder was partly her undoing. It was followed by an attempt to take the life of Raziyat. The conspiracy failed. Shah Turkan was taken prisoner by the infuriated mob of Delhi. The Turkish Amirs seized her son, then they rallied round Raziyat and hailed her as the Queen.

Yet the road was rough. The wazir of the kingdom refused to acknowledge her. At once the youthful Queen rose to her full stature. She crushed the rebels. She hunted them down. No man could have acted with more decision and energy. In a few months, "from Lakhnauti to Debal and Damrilah (to use the words of the chronicler) all the Malikis and Amirs tendered their submission and obedience."

But how about the woman in her? Even the Queen of Delhi could not in fairness be expected to lead a loveless life. And love, it seems, was Raziyat's undoing. There

was an Abyssinian slave of Iltutmish who had risen from humble rank to the position of *Amir-i-Akhur*, Lord of the Stables. Razyia liked him. In a palace where intrigue and conspiracy lurked in darkness like rats, ready to come out at the first opportunity, Jamal-ud-din Yaqut was a source of comfort. Razyia had faith in him. And it seems that the man deserved all her faith.

But then Yaqut was a slave. What was far worse, he was an Abyssinian. It was openly seen that he lifted (or perhaps simply helped) the Queen to the back of her horse. Scandal went about in whispers. In a month or so Razyia was the subject of a hundred thousand whispers. Then the sheer weight of the scandal became such as to embolden whispering tongues to break into hisses and even loud utterance. The kingdom of Delhi pointed a stern finger of accusation at their youthful Queen.

A historian has written: "It was not that a virgin queen was forbidden to love—she might have indulged herself in a submissive Prince Consort, or revelled almost unchecked in the dark recesses of the palace harem. But wayward fancy pointed in a wrong direction, and led her to prefer a person employed about her court, an Abyssinian moreover, the favours extended to whom the Turkish nobles resented with one accord."

The most powerful body in the Kingdom of Delhi was the corps of Turkish nobles (Mamluks) known as the "Forty." They had not only helped to establish the dynasty, but had brought Razyia to the throne. Now they turned round. The unwomanly conduct of a Queen who dressed and went about like a man was bad enough; her choice of an Abyssinian as a "favourite" was the limit. Grimly the Forty resolved to strip Razyia of all her glory.

Perhaps she could have saved the situation by making

compromises. She might have healed orthodox opinion by abandoning her "ultra-modern" ways. She might have sacrificed Jamal-ud-din Yaqut, and built with his dead body a bridge over the crisis. Even if that did not suffice, she could have kept herself on the throne as a puppet.

But Razyia would not yield an inch. She would not give up her Abyssinian, nor live as one who was only decorative. She challenged the Forty to do its worst. She dashed into the heat of battle.

She failed, and was captured along with Jamal-ud-din Yaqut. The Abyssinian was forthwith murdered. Razyia was imprisoned in a fort. Her reign had lasted for three years and six months and six days.

Then a strange thing happened. Having lost her battle with arms she now fought with her beauty. She met the rebel leader Altumia, but not in a man's garb. Her tunic of silk and brocade was a blaze of colour. Her figure seemed no longer boyish, but had all the softness and allure of a beautiful woman. The Queen of Delhi was out to vamp, to enthrall a man by setting aflame his passion.

The great noble Altumia fell ensnared. He married the captive queen, and at her behest marched towards Delhi to recover her lost kingdom. Meanwhile, a stepbrother of Razyia had been raised to the throne. In a pitched battle Razyia and her husband were defeated and taken prisoners. In vain had she used her beauty for a political purpose. Such was the wrath of her enemies that they quickly put her to death along with Altumia.

## ALBUQUERQUE'S GRAND VISION

**H**IS countrymen call him Albuquerque the Great, though he does not quite deserve the title. He had nothing of genius, nor of imagination. But he was a pioneer. Alfonso da Albuquerque was, since Alexander, the first European who dreamed of an Empire in Asia.

The road had been laid by Vasco da Gama a few years earlier. Hitherto, ships from the West had come down only to the Red Sea. A narrow neck of land stopped their progress. (The Suez Canal was cut centuries later). The Arabian Sea was Arab not merely in name. But Vasco da Gama rounded the Cape of Good Hope—it was a lucky accident—and reached Indian shores. The discovery of this sea-route was one of the most fruitful events in world history.

Vasco da Gama, crossing unknown and dangerous oceans in frail, poorly equipped sail boats, dreamed of gaining new trade rather than new territory. But Albuquerque, who came out at the head of an expedition backed by the Royal House of Portugal, was quick to see that factories had little chance of survival unless guarded by forts. Trade in India could best be carried out in the shadow of Portuguese guns. The rivalry of the Arab merchant had to be smashed. Sea-ports had to be wrested. If the favour of some kings was won, the frown of others had to be faced.

Circumstances were in his favour. Portugal was

then at the height of its glory. The nation had been steeled by long-drawn warfare with the Moors. It had become populous, daring, fond of enterprise, eager to spread out into the world. The Royal House was interested in exploration. There was a great demand for spices and Indian luxuries—an incentive that promised as much gold as glory. Besides, India was then a mere geographical expression. The Mughal dynasty had not yet started, and hundreds of petty kingdoms scarred the face of the country.

The most significant circumstance, one may be pardoned for repeating, was the discovery of the direct sea-route from Europe to Asia. It was no longer necessary that goods should be carried, as they used to be, either by the Persian Gulf and overland to the ports in the Levant, or by the Red Sea and across Egypt from Suez to Alexandria. The help of Arabs and Persians could be dispensed with. Ships from Europe could reach Indian waters and go back to their homeland loaded with a rich merchandise of silk and pepper and cloves.

“This great Captain was a man of middle stature, with a long face, fresh-coloured, the nose somewhat large,” runs a contemporary account. “He was a prudent man, and a Latin scholar, and spoke in elegant phrases. . . . He was of ready words, very authoritative in his commands, very circumspect in his dealings with the Moors, and greatly feared yet greatly loved by all, a quality rarely found united in one Captain. He was very valiant and favoured by fortune. . . . He was a man of the strictest veracity, and so pure in the justice he administered that the Hindus and Moors after his death, whenever they received any affront from the Governors of India, used to go Goa to his tomb and make offerings of choice flowers and of oil for his lamp, praying to do them jus-

tice...He was very honourable in his manner of life, and so careful over his language that the greatest oath which he ever took when he was very much enraged was this: "I abhor the life that I live."

The blood of Royalty descending through a succession of illegitimate children (there was the beautiful mistress of King Denis who gave birth to Don Alfonso Sanchas, the first Lord of the Castle of Albuquerque. There were other famed beauties—Dona Beatrice, Dona Maria, Dona Theresa) flowed in his veins. As a youth of eighteen he had served in a military expedition to Morocco. Then followed long decades of perilous adventure, over strange seas and lands. On his return to Portugal he put a bold scheme before King Emmanuel.

Portuguese national interest demanded that the trade routes by the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf be closed. Thus alone could Muhammadan commerce with India be destroyed and the monopoly of that trade be seized.

The King was impressed. He accepted this imperialistic policy, and sent Albuquerque to the East with a squadron of five ships. Among the captain's many exploits before he reached India was his attack on Ormuz, a prosperous port at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. The possession of Ormuz, described by travellers as "the richest jewel set in the ring of the world," would enable Portugal to dominate Eastern commerce.

Mutiny in his ships thwarted his schemes of building a fortress at Ormuz after he had taken it. For the moment he abandoned the design and proceeded to India to take up office as Captain-General of the Portuguese possessions there. Once more there were difficulties. Almeida, his predecessor in that office, refused to hand over charge and even thrust him into prison. The arrival of a fresh fleet from Portugal commanded by a relative of Albuquerque

brought about his release and assumption of power.

His policy in India was to shake hands with Hindu Rajas and to look upon Muhammadans as enemies to be destroyed. Like all other Portuguese he could never forget the role of the Moors in the history of his country. One of his first moves was to make an alliance with the Hindu Rajas of Vijayanagar. The second was to lead an expedition against the Zamorin of Calicut.

The central aim of his policy had not been lost in the tangle of Indian hostilities and alliances. Red Sea calling! That was the thought ceaselessly throbbing in his blood. Portugal would prosper immensely if she succeeded in putting an end to the Muhammadan commerce borne by the Red Sea.

So he equipped a fleet of twenty-three ships, gathered 1,000 soldiers on board and made ready to sail for Arabia. But at this moment his plans changed. A low-caste Hindu pirate named Timoja put before him an alternative scheme of campaign. The Muhammedan ruler of Goa was dead. There was dispute about his succession. The city was in a state of chaos. There could be no better opportunity of taking it. Albuquerque, convinced by the argument, put off his expedition to the Red Sea.

Half-way between Bombay and Cape Comorin, at the mouths of two rivers, stood the little island of Goa. Its tall fine buildings showed a clash of architectural ideals. Its streets were thronged by merchants of many nationalities—specially Arabs from Ormuz who sold a splendid breed of horses. In the fourteenth century the island had belonged to the Raja of Vijayanagar. For a brief space it attained independence. Then it was conquered by a Muslim ruler who was so pleased with the acquisition that he "ordered the march of triumph to be beaten for seven days." In a few years, however, it was wrested



from this man by Adil Shah, who had come to India as a slave, become a soldier in the ranks and pushed his way up to be crowned King of Bijapur.

Adil Shah ruled Goa through an agent, a fanatical Muslim who oppressed his Hindu subjects. On the eve of Albuquerque's assault a Yogi prophesied that foreigners from a distant land would conquer Goa. The assault was bloodless. The city surrendered without opposition, and the soldiers who were expected to defend it fled with such haste that many of them were drowned while crossing the river.

The victors, it is recorded, were received by the people with "shouts of welcome," and showers of gold and silver flowers. Presently there came embassies from great sovereigns, including one from the Shah of Persia. At one stroke the Portuguese had raised themselves to a place of eminence. Great was the prestige of the rulers of Goa.

With Goa as his base of operations, Albuquerque once more looked westward and saw the bluish-grey waters of the Red Sea lapping the shores of his ambition. But once more he had to draw a veil over his painted vision. Down south in the Indian Ocean was Malacca, a centre of the spice trade. Five Portuguese ships had stood in that harbour while some of their inmates had landed and built a factory. The Muhammedan merchants of the place had become jealous and alarmed, and induced the Prime Minister of Malacca to destroy the whole Portuguese squadron. The plan was to invite all the officers to a banquet at which they would be murdered: then the ships would be attacked and taken.

A young Javanese woman heard whispers of the conspiracy and trembled. Her heart beat quickly as she gathered its details. She dashed to the sea and flung herself on the waves. Her slender arms worked in the

waters ; her breath came in gasps ; she swam on and on till eager hands reached out to lift her heaving body on a boat. She searched the faces and spoke one word, one Portuguese name. In a minute she beheld her lover, flew into his arms, and in broken, vague phrases accompanied by many gestures she told him of the plot.

The trivial fact that a Javanese girl had fallen in love with a Portuguese sailor foiled the design of Malacca's Prime Minister. The ships' officers declined his invitation. The Malaccans tried to attack the ships, but they sailed away. The men in charge of the factory, however, were taken prisoner.

When the news reached Goa, Albuquerque started out with eighteen ships to rescue the men. His success was complete. Portuguese flags flew all over the city. The Sultan was in flight. Albuquerque at once built a fortress in Malacca. The road was now clear to the commerce of the Malay Peninsula and the Spice Islands. The spice trade of the East fell almost completely in Portuguese hands. Albuquerque's vision of Empire was not an empty dream !

Now the time was ripe to carry through his main project of imperialism—the conquest of Aden, the gateway of the Red Sea. So the great Captain sailed out with twenty ships. The conquest of Aden, a great clearing-centre of Muslim commerce and a halting-station for Mecca pilgrims, would have made Portuguese power triumphant in Asia.

Aden, ruled by a chief who owned allegiance to the Sultan of Egypt, was defended by a powerful army, and its walls were mounted with artillery. Albuquerque planned assault by escalade. His men dashed to the walls rising from the sea, placed ladders and started to climb. But the onrush of many feet, the attempt of numerous

soldiers to mount up at once, caused the ladders to be broken. A handful of men reached the town only to be hacked by Arab swords.

Valour had failed against superior force. Albuquerque had received a rude shock. Bold strange schemes had occupied his mind, to be executed when Aden was taken. One was to make an alliance with David, the Christian Emperor of Abyssinia (a Spanish Ambassador was holding a place of eminence in David's court), and to overthrow with his help the Muhammadan dynasty in Egypt. Another was to divert the waters of the Nile and make the river flow through Abyssinia to the Red Sea and thus destroy the fertility of the Egyptian plains. This idea occupied him so much that he requested the King of Portugal to send him experienced miners from the island of Madeira, who were expert in digging through rocks. A third project, equally bold and grandiose, was to send a detachment of soldiers to Medina to carry off the body of Muhammad and then to ransom it for the city of Jerusalem.

Soon after came censure from his King for certain aspects of his policy stigmatised as inordinately expensive. Enemies were at work at the Royal Court at Lisbon. Albuquerque wrote a spirited letter to the King defending his own policy. He would gladly alter it, he said, "for the pleasure of seeing the cards of the game of India shuffled for a new deal", but his patriotism forbade him. "Do not require of me every year an account of what I am doing as if I were a tax-gatherer, because ill-mannered fellows who sit at home like idols in their pagodas, have borne false witness against me ; but honour me and thank me, for I shall be happy to complete this enterprise..... So long as I am Governor, I shall not send you painted pictures of fictitious places, but of

Kingdoms taken by force of arms from their masters and fortified by me in such a manner that they may give a good account of themselves to all time."

But King Emmanuel was not pleased with this frank language. He suspected that his Captain-General wanted to make himself an independent prince at Goa. And he signed a hasty order of Albuquerque's recall.

When Albuquerque received news of this humiliation, he was preparing for a journey longer than the one to Portugal. Worn out with a fatal illness, he was sailing down the sea in the *Flor da Rosa*, old, his long beard reaching down to his waist. The news pierced him like a dart. A Portuguese chronicler describes the scene. "He lifted up his hands and gave thanks unto Our Lord and cried: 'In bad repute with men because of the King, and in bad repute with the King because of the men, it were well that I were gone.'"

When his dead body was conveyed to Goa, "so great was the crying and weeping on all sides that it seemed as if the very rivers of Goa were being poured out."

How far had he fulfilled his dream of Empire? He had built strong fortresses in Goa, Calicut, Cochin, Cannanore, Ormuz, and Malacca, all well-supplied with men and guns. Round these nuclei great chunks of territory could be gained. He had built up friendly relations with the Kings of Bengal, Pegu, Siam, Pacem and China. He had filled Goa harbour with a fleet of fifty sail. He had arranged money to be struck at Goa and Malacca in the name of his King. He was the first Portuguese Captain who had penetrated to the Straits of the Red Sea. Above all, he had made the name of Portugal feared and honoured in Asia.

No Empire was built in a day, nor in a single man's lifetime. Albuquerque, with his restless vigour and in-

tense patriotism, did laborious spade-work and laid excellent foundations. It remained with his successors to construct an edifice. But they were ineffectual, unwise, without any statesmanship. They ruined the cause of Portugal by cruel religious persecution. They established the dreaded Inquisition at Goa. Portugal itself was in decay. It could never aspire to struggle for Empire against the other European Powers that were now hastening to the East.

The results of one feature of Albuquerque's policy are still visible today. He conceived a unique idea of colonisation by means of mixed marriages. He tried his best to create a race of half-caste Portuguese who would have an European complex. With this view he induced his officers and men to marry Indian women, himself presided at the marriages, and gave each couple a suitable dowry as a start in life.

## AN EMPIRE GOES DOWN

ONE summer day the huge hills of granite through which the Tungabhadra snaked with swift-moving grace woke to the sound of marching feet. In the black-cotton plains ahead Krishna Deva Raya was advancing in a north-easterly direction with a million men. The soldiers alone numbered 736,00. Of these 35,000 were cavalry, clad in shining armour. There were 550 elephants. The archers and musketeers wore tunics of strong raw leather, protection against sword and lance. The shieldmen with swords and daggers in their girdles carried shields so huge that they covered the whole body. The horses were magnificently caparisoned. The elephants were huge beasts with sharp knife blades fastened to their curved tusks.

Ten thousand carriers with filled water skins followed the army, for in the scorching heat the soldiers suffered from thirst. All kinds of merchandise were for sale, even rubies and diamonds. Slowly, like a moving city, the huge armed force trailed along the boulder-scarred plateau, neat, disciplined, self-assured.

Krishna Deva Raya, King of Kings, Lord of the greater lords in India, Lord of the three seas and of the land (that, precisely, was his title), was of medium height, fair-complexioned, with a good figure and signs of small-pox on his face. Monarch of a vast kingdom full of wealth and luxury and splendour, he was fond of display.

His capital was one of the richest cities in the world. He was now marching to fight his hereditary enemy, Sultan Adil Shah of Bijapur.

Vijayanagar, the city of Victory, was built by two brothers, Harihar and Bukka, in 1336. Southern India had been held by a number of old Hindu dynasties. There was neither unity, nor goodwill. The result was that in 1293 Ala-ud-din Khilji, spearhead of the Muhammadan inroad into the Deccan, found it easy enough to capture Devagiri. Some years after, his General, Malik Kafur, took Warangal and Dwarasamudra, and pierced into the Malabar Coast where he erected a mosque. A new attack on Devagiri took place in 1312, when its Prince Haripala Deva was flayed alive, and his head was set up to stare with unseeing eyes from the carved gate of his city.

The Muslims had complete sway over the countries down to the Vindhya mountains. The terror that stalked the north was now relentlessly making its way to the south. "Everything," writes Sewell, "seemed to be leading up to but one inevitable end—the ruin and devastation of the Hindu provinces, the annihilation of their old royal houses, the destruction of their religion, their temples, their cities. All that the dwellers in the south held most dear seemed tottering to its fall. Suddenly, about the year 1344 A.D., there was a check to this wave of foreign invasion—a stop—a halt—then a solid wall of opposition; and for 250 years Southern India was saved."

How did it happen? When the Muhammadans thrust down to the bank of the Krishna river, the fear-stricken Hindu States, worn by age, nerveless, combined all their power for a final struggle and marshalled themselves under the lead of the warrior kings of Anegundi. They gained a decisive victory over the enemy, but lost themselves. The union of small states became a single solid

body. The old kings submitted to the new leadership, and round the nucleus of Anegundi there grew up the great empire of Vijayanagar, stretching from the Krishna to Cape Comorin.

The capital of that name, standing on the south bank of the Tungabhadra among the tumbled mass of rock, was sixty miles in circumference. A contemporary traveller, Abdur Razaak, writes: "The city of Bijanagar is such that the pupil of the eye has never seen a place like it, and the ear of intelligence has never been informed that there existed anything to equal it in the world." He also described the bazaars where pearls, rubies, emeralds and diamonds were sold in vast quantities. "Roses sold everywhere. These people could not live without roses, which they considered as necessary as food."

An interesting feature of the Hindu Empire was complete religious toleration. Sprung from the urge to save Hindu polity from the destructive fury of Islam, Vijayanagar had no taste for persecuting the alien faith. The chronicler Firishta tells us: "Deo Roy gave orders for the entertainment of Mussulmauns in his service, allotted them jaghires, erected a mosque for their use in the city of Beejanuggur, and commanded that no one should molest them in the exercise of their religion. He also ordered a Koraun to be placed before his throne, on a rich desk, that the Mussulmauns might perform the ceremony of obeisance in his presence without sinning against their laws."

In the earlier days of the empire it had to pass through heavy storms. There was, for example, the invasion of Firoz Shah, the Sultan of a kingdom that was Vijianagar's rival and bitterest enemy. The invasion (1406 A.D.) was brought about by King Deva Raya I's amorous adventure. Firishta relates the story in detail.



"There resided in the district of Mudkal a farmer who was blessed with a daughter of such exquisite beauty, that the Creator seemed to have united all his powers in making her perfect."

The girl's tutor, an old Brahmin, thought : This marvellous gem should adorn the palace of Vijayanagar. So he proceeded to that city, saw the Raya and spoke in such praise of her beauty and accomplishments that he was fired with the desire to marry her. "She will be Ranee of Vijayanagar," he assured the Brahmin solemnly. "Bring her soon." And he sent him back with rich gifts and promises of favour to the parents.

The Brahmin returned to the farmer's house and delivered the message to him and his wife. Overjoyed at such unexpected fortune, they called their daughter and showed her the Raya's gifts. "Oh, Peral, you were born under a lucky star. A peasant's daughter, you will marry the greatest of kings." They put round her neck a golden collar set with jewels, the token of espousal.

"No," the lively Peral cried, shrinking away as if she had glimpsed a snake. "Never shall I enter the palace. Whoever goes there is not allowed to see her parents and friends. I shall die without you, my father, my mother. Sell me not for worldly riches." She thrust off the golden collar with her hands. All persuasion failed. Grieved at the sight of her tears, the parents said to the Brahmin : "Take back thy gifts. Our daughter will not leave us."

The King received the news with fury. "I will get her by force," he vowed, though the lands around Mudkal were a point of dispute between himself and Bijapur, and to trespass was to court war. Galloping night and day with five thousand of his best horse, the King arrived at the village and surrounded it.

But the bird had flown. The news of invasion had travelled faster than the King, and the village was deserted. On their way back, the troops plundered the country.

The Sultan of Bijapur was not slow to act. Pushed back and besieged in his capital, Deva Raya agreed to buy peace at a humiliating price. He had to give his daughter to the Sultan in marriage. He also lost the peasant girl, Peral, whom he had so passionately desired. Sultan Firoz sent for her out of curiosity, and finding that her beauty exceeded all report he gave her hand to his eldest son, a weak and dissipated prince who ended his inglorious life in debauchery. Such was the tragic destiny of Peral, cursed with an extraordinary beauty.

Krishna Deva Raya was one of the greatest rulers of Vijayanagar, and during his sway the empire rose to the height of culture and power. An absolute monarch he was, as the Portuguese chronicler Domingo Paes says. "gallant and perfect in all things." Hard physical exercise with sword and clubs gave him a neat athletic bearing. He was an able statesman, an excellent general, noble-minded, courteous. The first ten years of the reign was a period of peace. But even while the King built temples and towers and the enormous statue of *Narasimha* (hewn out of one single rock of granite), he was preparing carefully for war. Old accounts had to be settled. The districts of Mudkal and Raichur, which had seen the disgrace of a former king, were still a point of dispute. Krishna Deva planned to bring down his Muslim neighbour in the north with a smashing attack.

He marched with a million men and entrenched himself within nine miles of Raichur. His vast encampment was surrounded by a hedge of thorns. The camp was divided into regular streets, with extensive markets stocking all

kinds of meat, grains, vegetables, precious stones, abundant grass and straw. (The country was barren and sandy; fodder was needed for 32,400 horses and 550 elephants every day as also for numberless beasts of burden.) "Indeed (to quote Nuniz) no one who did not understand the meaning of what he saw would ever dream that a war was going on, but would think that he was in a prosperous city."

Drums and trumpets sounded at dawn. It was the signal for battle. But it was not until two hours after sunrise that the hostile armies came to grips.

The Muhammadans were at first driven back, hard pressed. But suddenly a withering storm of flaming balls came from their ranks. Adil Shah was firing from all his guns. The Hindu troops massed in close formation reeled and staggered back. Hundreds were mowed down. Through the smoke and chaos and bombardment the Muslim cavalry charged. The Hindu troops took to flight, the enemy close on their heels.

In his moment of crisis, Krishna Deva rose to his full stature. "Traitors!" he shouted. "Die boldly, as your ancestors died for centuries!"

His shout rose to a bellow. "Who will range with me? Adil Shah may boast that he has slain the world's greatest monarch. He will never boast of vanquishing him!"

The Hindus paused, turned and faced the enemy again. That was the end for the Muslims. Like hawks they had rushed in pursuit. Like sheep they now died, their ranks totally disordered in the triumphal rush and unable to form. They were driven back to the river where thousands were killed. Adil Shah escaped on the back of an elephant. It was a decisive victory. For many

years after the Muslims thought of Krishna Deva Raya with respectful terror.

The battle was a turning-point in the annals of the Deccan. Bijapur was broken-backed. Its dreams of conquest were no more. There was nothing for it but to seek alliance with its Muslim neighbours. Those states had noted with deep anxiety the accession of strength that a Hindu kingdom achieved. Their pride had been touched to the core by Krishna Deva Raya's terms of peace, which included the demand that the Bijapur Sultan must kiss his feet. Faced by the menace of Hindu aggression, the Muslim kingdoms buried their rivalry and drew close to each other. Vijayanagar was elated by victory. Its rulers were more arrogant than ever. It was clear that there could be no peace between the Muslim and the Hindu power. War was a question of time.

Vijayanagar had risen out of a combination of Hindu States in face of the onslaught of Islam. Its overthrow was the outcome of a similar combination of Muslim states stung to unity by the dread of Hindu invasion.

On the field of Talikota the confederation of Muslim powers met the common enemy. The Hindu army was led by Rama Rajah, then "ninety-six years old, but as brave as a man of thirty." (The words are De Couto's). He was so confident of victory that he ordered his men not to kill Adil Shah of Bijapur and Ibrahim of Golconda, but to capture and bring them alive, so that they could be kept confined in iron cages.

A mere elephant decided the issue of the battle. In the thick of the fight, when victory was uncertain, an elephant of Nizam Shah dashed wildly towards Rama Rajah who was seated on a "rich throne set with jewels, under a canopy of crimson velvet embroidered with gold and adorned with fringes of pearls." The terrified litter-

bearers let fall their burden at the enemy's approach. In that moment of confusion the Muslims pounced upon him and took him prisoner.

The Hindus were fighting valiantly when a spear rose high in the Muslim ranks, so that it was visible to all. On its point was the severed head of Rama Rajah! That was enough. History repeated itself mercilessly. Many times in the annals of the Muslim invasion of India the death of a chief had put the Hindu army to flight, even on the point of victory. So it happened now. The Muslims glutted themselves with slaughter. Above 100,000 Hindus were killed. The river that flowed near Talikota was reddened with their blood.

Then followed the destruction of the magnificent capital. The princes of the royal house fled away with treasures valued at more than a hundred million sterling. Yet fabulous wealth remained to be looted. The Muslims did their work with amazing thoroughness, wiping the town out of existence, burning the buildings to ashes, destroying temples and palaces and sculptures, even breaking the granite limbs of the huge Narasimha monolith.

"Never perhaps, in the history of the world," says Sewell, "has such havoc been wrought, and wrought so suddenly, on so splendid a city....In the full plentitude of prosperity one day, and on the next seized, pillaged and reduced to ruins, amid scenes of savage massacre and horrors beggaring description."

Vijayanagar to-day is a ruin and a memory.

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## CHAITANYA AND HIS MOVEMENT

**T**HE dark and terrible ocean of the world I too shall cross, like the sages of yore, by intent devotion to the Supreme Being, by serving at the lotus feet of Mukunda."

A slim, fair-complexioned youth of twenty-five, clad in loincloth, with shaven head, chanted this verse in rapture as he walked up the country on foot, moving day and night, swiftly on his way to Vrindaban. People who saw him were struck by his beauty and cried out, "Hari! Hari!" Three companions were following him. At dusk they would stop a while and begin a *sankirtan* in a frenzy of emotional storm, a rapid ecstatic rhythm in the sway of their feet. They sprang and shouted and trembled and cried out in broken accents. They shed tears of joy. Perspiration streamed down their faces. They were caught, helpless, in the tide of their passion.

The youth was one Nimai, "Shortlived," so named since his parents had lost eight children. He was born in Navadwipa, a town on the Ganges, 75 miles north of Calcutta, a great centre of trade and Hindu culture. Sanskrit knowledge flourished, but it was a mere intellectual gymnastic. The pundits were concerned with the shell of words, not with the inner meaning. With scrupulous care they performed religious ceremonies, yet they were without faith, without piety. This was one of the transition eras in Indian history. Hindu culture was almost

non-existent, a mere subject for the scholar's research. Decay and degradation were sweeping over Indian spiritual life.

In this senile society Nimai was born on a night of full moon, auspicious because of a lunar eclipse. His Brahmin parents were noted for religious devotion. The child was called Gaur or Gauranga by the neighbours because of his fair complexion. As he grew up he astounded all by his precocious mastery of Sanskrit learning, especially grammar and logic (*Nyaya*).

In course of time he established himself as a scholar, surpassing all other pundits in Navadvipa, and even defeated a celebrated champion who was going about India challenging all noted scholars to disputation. Pride shone in the young scholar's eyes. He seemed to soar sky-high, looking down upon his fellow-men from a dizzy height. But complete spiritual change came over him after a pilgrimage to Gaya, where he met the Vaishnava monk Ishwar Puri. Gone was his pride of learning. He was consumed by *bhakti* of Krishna, shouting his name, and even living Krishna in himself, so that his ways seemed streaked with madness. His teaching profession he abandoned. "There is a dark boy playing on the flute," he told his pupils. "I behold him constantly. I move everywhere with him. All that I hear is Krishna's name....I take leave of you all. From this day I shall not have any more pupils."

The bleak way of intellect was ended for him, and there stretched the way of *bhakti*, love. Teaching was replaced by *sankirtan*. Clapping his hands to the cry of Krishna and Hari, the strange youth rolled in ecstasy on the ground. All Navadvipa came to see him. Many thought he was an *avatar* of Krishna. Great processions

passed down the streets, dancing and singing songs of devotion.

Nityananda and Haridas were his first disciples. Their great achievement was the redemption of two notorious brigands who were "sunk in measureless wine," and varied their friendship for each other with dog-like fights. Born of respectable Brahman families, Jagai and Madhai led bold bad lives, and were the terror of the town.

It was to these men that the disciples, heedless of warning, carried their cult of love. "Say Krishna! Worship Krishna! Chant Krishna's name!" The two drunkards, rolling in the dust of the road, looked up with eyes of wrath. Presently they came rushing up. An earthenware pot flew through the air and broke to pieces on Nityananda's head. Blood spurted out and coursed down the holy man's face.

Men rushed in panic and carried the news to the Master. By this time the drunken ruffians had shaken off the torpor of wine. At the Master's approach they cowered. His personality stirred them strangely. They fell at his feet and wept in bitter repentance, imploring compassion. The redemption was complete. The two ruffians' way of living changed entirely.

From house to house the Master carried *sankirtan* till the voice of mockery was partly hushed. But not many of the famous pundits of Navadvipa, proud of their learning, rich with abundant gifts from their disciples, were impressed by the new devotion. Nimai found the situation hopeless. Navadvipa was a prison.

On the day when the sun turned towards the sign of Cancer, he gave up the sacred thread, shaved off his hair, assumed a red robe and received initiation from Keshab Bharati. The Guru gave him a new name. "You have



brought the soul's awakening by your *sankirtan*. Henceforth the world will know you as Shri Krishna Chaitanya."

Then the customary staff and begging bowl in hand, the *sannyasi* set out for Vrindaban on the Jamuna bank. The centuries had covered this village of Krishna's boyhood with a dense mass of jungle. The sacred sites were lost. But Vrindaban lived in legend and even more vividly in the scriptures.

It can well be imagined how the *sannyasi* with his highly sensitive mind wandered in the jungle and heard the trees and stones speak. His eager imagination peopled the loneliness with men and women of thousands of years ago, among them Krishna, the divine flute-player, kindling strange fires in the hearts of the milk-women, Krishna, the destroyer of evil, the great warrior, the stern philosopher of the Gita.

From this time Vrindaban began to be reclaimed. Vaishnava devotees came and settled down in the place creating a new centre of learning. Money poured in from rich merchants. The royal house of Jaipur gave its patronage to the growing town. To-day it is one of the greatest centres of pilgrimage.

But Chaitanya stayed in Krishnaland only for a brief spell. A call came from the south, and the *sannyasi* set out for Puri, a thousand miles away. Then he went further south on a missionary tour. Wherever he went he preached the Vaishnava tenets and made thousands of converts. In a lonely forest he came across a Buddhist monk, and his vigorous logic tore the man's arguments to pieces. Then, as the *Chaitanya-Charit-Amrita* (a contemporary work by Krishnadas Kaviraj) records, the Buddhists, shamed by defeat, made a wicked plot. They offered unclean rice to Chaitanya, calling it the *prasad* of Vishnu. Suddenly a huge bird swooped down, lifted the

plate in its beak and dropped it on the Buddhist monk, injuring his head ! The miracle alarmed the monk's devotees and they cried out to their visitor, "Thou art God incarnate. Forgive us!" "Chant Krishna's name," said the Master. Loud rose the joyous cry and was taken up by the monk himself.

Ray Pratap Rudra of the Gajapati dynasty was then King of Orissa. He tried to secure an interview with the Master. But Chaitanya would not see him. Pratap Rudra was distressed. "The Master served even Jagai and Madhai. Will he deliver the whole world, all save Pratap Rudra ?

"Even as a jar of milk is shunned if it contains one drop of wine, so is Pratap Rudra, with all his virtues, defiled by his title of King."

But at the end Pratap Rudra had his way. During the car festival of Jagannath, while Chaitanya lay in a trance, the King arrived, dressed as a common Vaishnava, and clasped the Master's feet, nursing them, and citing verses from the Bhagbat. Chaitanya rose in ecstasy and embraced the stranger. "You have given me many priceless gems. I can only give this embrace in return."

At the age of thirty he settled down at Puri. Seventeen years of life now remained to him. Towards the close of that period he swooned often under the unbearable convulsion of religious ecstasy. Such was his forgetfulness of the earthly self that once he battered his face against a wall. Then one night he jumped into the moon-whitened sea which seemed to him a-sparkle like the Jamuna at Vrindaban.

The end of the Master came suddenly. A brick pierced his left toe and the wound proved fatal. Meteors and thunderbolts (says the *Chaitanya-mangal*) crashed down at the woeful moment. But Nityananda consoled the sor-

rowing disciples: "We will keep alive the *Nama*. We will make all men, even untouchables, *Vaishnavas*. Without distinction of caste or creed we will give love and *bhakti* to all."

That indeed was the greatest gain of the Chaitanya movement. Its casteless, equalitarian ideals built a bridge over social gulfs. Further, it gave a softness, a romantic dream-atmosphere, to the Hindu religion which had been hardening, freezing into the Tantric way.

An essential doctrine of the great Vaishnava preacher was revealed in these words: "Be like a tree. The tree gives shade even to him who cuts its boughs. It asks no water of anyone, though it be withering away for want of it. Rain and storm and the burning rays of the sun it suffers, but gives sweet-scented flowers and delicious fruits to others. Patiently serve others even as a tree"

## A MUSLIM HEROINE

“**Y**AH KISHWAR KHAN, thou latrine dirt, here is a nice gift for thee”, screamed a woman from a second-floor window, and flung a basketful of ashes over a rider as he went by, accompanied by a procession of horsemen.

“Thou oppressor of Chand Bibi, noblest among all noble ladies, who is beloved by all in Bijapur save thee—take this as a token of our feeling”, cried a woman from another window and flung a basket of dirt and ashes. The cry was repeated a hundred times from a hundred houses.

Kishwar Khan rode with bowed head. The streets were full of jostling crowds who greeted him repeatedly with hoots and hisses. “The days of sin are ended”, the men shouted. “Our troops are marching to the capital. They will rescue Chand Begam from the fort of Satara where thou hast imprisoned her. They will make thee pay for all thy misdeeds, pay with compound interest and more.”

The facts were as follows. Ali Adil Shah, the Sultan of Bijapur, had shown implicit faith in the intelligence and administrative talents of his wife, Chand Begam, a princess from the neighbouring state of Ahmednagar. He had allowed her to share with him the direction of public affairs. She gave audience in open durbar. Her daring, firmness and justice endeared her to the men of Bijapur.

Adil Shah died in 1579, and was succeeded by a nine-year-old nephew. In view of the Sultan's tender age the government was entrusted to two co-regents : one was Chand Begam, the other Kishwar Khan. The latter, a man of ambition, sought to concentrate all power in his hands. On the false accusation that Chand Begam had invited her brother the Sultan of Ahmednagar to invade Bijapur, he persuaded the boy-king to confine her in the fort of Satara. Then he was free to wield despotic power.

But his rule was cut short. As the troops came marching to Bijapur, Kishwar Khan escaped from the city. The young King at once sent for his aunt and besought her to resume the office of Regent.

But trouble came again. The new minister, Ekhlas Khan, was an Abyssinian. He was violent in temper, uncontrollable. The favour he showed to his own countrymen excited the jealousy of the Deccanees, and there were bloody fights on the streets. The kingdom was in chaos. Vulture eyes from neighbouring states watched it with impatient greed.

Armies marched out from Golconda and Berar and invested the feud-torn city. This brought the Abyssinian minister to his senses. Though turbulent, he was faithful to the throne he served, and defended the city-wall. All his efforts, however, would have been futile but for the courage and valour of the Queen-Regent. On a night of crisis the disheartened troops were stirred to enthusiasm by a strange sight. Torrents of rain poured through the darkness. It was as if the overburdened sky would come hurtling down in an avalanche of showers. Crash ! Twenty yards of the city wall crumbled and fell. The road was clear for the enemy. An assault was certain to take place at dawn. Hurrying through the lone streets

there came a veiled woman, tall in stature, simply dressed. Quickly she examined the breach. "Call the masons, bring each one of them," she commanded. She stood guard at the breach till the masons came and started the repair work. The rain continued on the following day, and the enemy could not make an effective assault. All day Chand Begam toiled at the breach with hardly a moment's rest.

The brave Queen's example saved the city in the terrible crisis. The siege continued and lasted for more than a year. The defending garrison was often on the verge of mutiny. Anarchy tried to rear its head. But the Amazon Queen of Bijapur had kindled an undying spark of hope. At last the siege had to be raised. Bijapur retained its independence.

There was more to be done—not at Bijapur, but in her native city of Ahmednagar, where a tragedy had taken place. Its ruler, Nizam Shah, who was Chand Bibi's brother, had a favourite—a dancer named Futtah Shah. This man used his influence to obtain grants of land and gifts of jewels from his royal master. At last he asked for two necklaces, made of the most valuable rubies, emeralds and pearls, plundered from the treasury of the Hindu Kingdom of Vijayanagar.

"The necklaces shall be yours," the Sultan said and issued the necessary orders.

His Minister, Salabat Khan, however, was heart-broken at the thought that such treasures would be given away. To evade his master's orders he procured two strings of imitation jewels resembling the original ones, and gave them to the favourite. But Futtah Shah found this out, and complained to the Sultan.

"Bring each and every stone in the treasury for my inspection", the Sultan commanded in fury.

Once more Salabat Khan tried to save some precious gems by concealing them. And again he was found out. Then a strange thing happened. The infuriated Sultan seized handfuls of diamonds and rubies, emeralds and pearls, and threw them into a fire. Salabat Khan tried to save a few, but the rest, including an invaluable collection of pearls, were destroyed.

None but a madman could have acted thus. From that day the Sultan began to throw off all control over himself. His growing madness took the form of an unaccountable hostility to his son, Meeran Hussain. He induced the young prince to sleep in a room near his own, and at night while Meeran was asleep, he set fire to it. The prince woke up and found himself almost surrounded by fire. He screamed for help. It was his father's favourite, the lancer Futtah Shah, who dashed in and rescued him.

Fearing for his life, Meeran Hussain fled from the kingdom. The enraged Sultan ordered his ministers to have the youth murdered. When they refused compliance, he dismissed them.

Chand Begam came from Bijapur and sought to bring her brother to his senses. In vain. The man was stark mad. He did not rule much longer. Meeran Hussain came back heading a revolt. When he attacked his father's palace, it was almost deserted.

It is interesting to note that among those few who had not proved traitor to the Sultan was the great chronicler Ferishta, then employed at the Ahmednagar court. From his memorable account the materials for this article and of some others in this series have been collected. Prince Meeran Hussain spared Ferishta's life, as he had been his school-fellow.

But the prince did not extend the same mercy to his

father, who it seems had now found his sanity again. The story may be related in Ferishta's own words : " Having reached the presence of his father, the Prince behaved to him, both in word and action, with every possible insult and abuse. Nizam Shah was silent, and only looked at him with contempt, till the Prince, putting his naked sabre across his breast, said : " I will put you to death." Nizam Shah, breathing a deep sigh, exclaimed. " Oh, thou accursed of God, it would be better for thee to let thy father be for his few remaining days thy guest, and to treat him with respect !" The Prince, relenting for a moment, stopped his hand and withdrew. Not having patience, however, to wait for his death, though he was in a mortal illness, he commanded him to be put into a warm bathing room, and shutting fast the doors and windows to exclude all air, lighted a great fire under the bath, so that the Sultan was speedily suffocated by the steam and heat." Ferishta adds the information that the murdered Sultan was buried with great pomp.

The new Sultan reigned for two months and three days. He gave himself up to an orgy of cruelty and debauchery. Chand Begam was a helpless spectator of his doings. Baffled in her mission, she bade farewell to her brother's son and left the kingdom with Ferishta, the historian. Soon after she had left, a revolt broke out in Ahmednagar. Meeran's minister seized him and hacked off his head in public. There followed riots for the succession between two rival parties—the Deccanees and the Abyssinians. In seven days a thousand Abyssinians were murdered, many of them being blown from the mouths of guns.

Meanwhile, Chand Begam was back at Bijapur. Her nephew, Ibrahim, had come of age and taken over the conduct of public affairs. Chand Begam was wise enough



to withdraw from any public interference in affairs of state. But Ibrahim always consulted her in private, and held her in affection and esteem.

Destiny had ordained that Chand Begam should have no rest, no peace. A call for help reached her ears once more from her native city. Ahmednagar was in peril. It was about to be attacked by the armed forces of the Mughal Emperor. The thrust of ruthless imperialism was about to be felt in the Deccan.

Chand Begam was now nearing her fiftieth year. A long experience of life's ills had made her melancholy and tired. She was happy at Bijapur, where she was respected and loved. But she was a Princess of Ahmednagar by birth, and when she was besought to undertake the regency and save the kingdom she could not but respond to the perilous call.

The invaders came, commanded by Prince Murad, but in spite of their strong artillery they could accomplish little. The Kings of Bijapur and Golconda, alarmed by the Mughal advance, sent armies to raise the siege. Murad resolved to attempt a storm before the reinforcements arrived. Mines were laid under the bastions of the fort and fired, blowing up several yards of the wall. In this hour of danger the leading officers of the Bijapur garrison prepared for flight. "But Chand Bibi", the chronicler tells us, "clad in armour, and with drawn sword in her hand, dashed forward to defend the breach. The fugitives returned and joined her."

She stood at the breach from morning to sunset, endeavouring to repair it. Column after column of Mughals were hurled upon the defenders, but repulsed, so that the moat was filled with bodies of the slain. Foremost among the defenders was Chand Begam. Her green veil was visible above all, and the shrill treble of her voice

was heard by every Bijapuri soldier, calling out her husband's battle-cry. At last, as night fell, the Mughals drew back, and during the breathing-space that followed the breach was repaired.

Murad complimented the Begam on her heroic defence, and made terms with her. Ahmednagar was saved.

But not for long. The terms of the treaty were broken by the men of Ahmednagar, and the Mughals returned in consequence. Once more the town was besieged. The defending garrison was divided against itself. One party desired to fight it out to the bitter end. But Chand Begam wished to come to terms, since resistance was useless. Infuriated, the war-party rushed into the streets and cried : " Behold, Chand Begam betrays the people ! She sells Ahmednagar to the Mughals for her own advantage."

The excitable soldiers of Ahmednagar dashed into the palace. But Chand Begam could not be found in the audience hall. Shouting like madmen, the soldiers broke open the doors of her private apartment, and were faced by the woman they sought, serene, absolutely self-possessed. She saw that the end was near, but did not tremble. She made no protest, shed no tear. The soldiers rushed on. A man sprang on Chand Begam and cut her down.

Thus died one of the noblest queens in history, a most unselfish and courageous woman, and a victim of the people whose interests were dearer to her than life itself.

## BABAR: DIARIST AND EMPEROR

**“WRITE** unaffectedly, clearly, with plain words. Such writing saves trouble to both writer and reader.” The words might have been those of Quiller-Couch, but they were penned four centuries ago by a wanderer on the Afghan hills. The man started his life among “fearful gorges, tremendous precipices, and murderous steep defiles.” And he ended it on the bejewelled throne of Delhi, the despotic ruler of an empire he himself had created. Babar, a great writer of autobiography, wielded with equal power the pen and the sword.

Consider the following extracts from his *Memoirs*. It is typical of the style he used; typical also of the life he led on the eve of his expedition to India.

“That night the storm was terrible, and snow fell so heavily that we all expected to die together. When we reached the mountain cave the storm was at its worst. We dismounted at its mouth. Deep snow! A one-man road! And even on that stamped-down and trampled road, pitfalls for horses! The first days at their shortest. The arrivals reached the cave by daylight, later they dismounted wherever they happened to be; dawn found many still in the saddle. The cave secured was small. I took a shovel, and scraping and clearing the snow away made a place for myself as big as a prayer-carpet—near its mouth. I dug down breast-high, but did not reach the ground. This made me a little shelter from the wind

when I sat right down in it. They begged me to go inside, but I would not. I felt that for me to be in warm shelter and comfort whilst my men were out in the snow and drift, for me to be sleeping at ease inside, whilst my men were in misery and distress, was not a man's act, and far from comradeship. As the Persian proverb says, 'In the company of friends Death is a nuptial feast'. So I remained in the snow and wind in the hole that I had dug out, with snow fourhands thick on my head and back and ears."

Lane-Poole, the biographer of Babar, has truly said of him: "His battles as well as orgies were humanised by a breath of poetry." He was handsome, well-mannered and affable, and yet furious when roused, a man of tremendous energy, fired with ambition, hating indolence but with a weakness for drink parties. He composed poetry, and loved the company of "enchanted dancing-girls with rosy cheeks, who sang tunes and displayed their accomplishments."

He had rare physical powers, and had been known to take up a man under each arm and run with them round a fortress, leaping the embrasures. He sometimes rode eighty miles a day, and passed a good deal of his time in the saddle. His body had such powers of resistance that he once survived the poison administered to him by a vengeful woman. He was a fine shot, a great general and a born leader of men. He lacked the intellect and broadmindedness of his grandson Akbar. But not many rulers in history have been gifted with such high literary accomplishment, such impeccable aesthetic sense.

He, a hunted fugitive in worn-out clothes, climbed the steep rough road that wound up to the throne of Kabul; and unsated still, turned to Hindustan, pushing his tall fierce soldiers five times against its battlements. Vic-

tory at Panipat. The conquest of Delhi. Immense loot in hand, including the famous diamond Koh-i-noor valued at "half the daily expenditure of the whole world." What then? Peace and security at last?

Not for him the cushioned ease of final accomplishment. The snatching of the Delhi crown from the Pathan Ibrahim Lodi was but a beginning. The way to power was not terminated. Babar had yet to fight his mightiest battle. He nearly lost it. Facing him there stood a man, or rather a fragment of a man, with an eye and an arm missing, broken-legged, bearing eighty wounds from sword and lance on his body. He was the Maharana of Chitor. His name was Sangram Singh (Lion in Battle), or simply Sanga.

Most ancient among the warrior clans of Rajasthan and preeminent among them all was the royal family of Mewar, claiming descent from Rama himself. Early in the sixteenth century the scion of the house was Raimall. He had three sons—Sanga and Prithvi Raj by one queen, Jaimall by another. Sanga, the first-born, was heir-apparent. He was a man of courage, but the martial quality in him was tempered with reflection. Prithwi Raj, equally brave, was undisciplined and reckless, and so was Jaimall. Prithwi burned perpetually with a thirst for action and often observed, "Fate has ordained me to rule the kingdom of Mewar." No love was lost between the three brothers. Indeed they hated one another like poison.

One day, as they were discussing the question of succession to the crown, Sanga observed that, though heir-apparent, he was prepared to forgo his rights and claims unless the priestess of Charuni Devi gave an omen in his favour. So the three brothers climbed up to the mountain temple along with their uncle Surajmall. Prithwi Raj and Jaimall entered first and sat on a mattress. Sanga

followed and sat on a panther skin. When they had explained their errand the prophetess said, "The panther skin is the omen of succession." At this Prithwi Raj flashed out his sword and would have falsified the omen, had not Surajmall stepped in quickly and received the blow aimed at Sanga while the prophetess fled from their fury. Sword hacked viciously at sword. Sanga fled for his life with five wounds on his body and an arrow in his eye. He lived *incognito* with goatherds, tending cattle. Suffering hardship but never revealing his identity, he at last found service under a Rajput chief in Ajmere and won the hand of his daughter.

When news of the fight at the Charuni temple reached Raimall's ears, he punished Prithwi Raj with banishment. But the exiled man soon proved his mettle by gathering troops under his banner and leading them successfully against certain enemies of Mewar. His bold deeds reconciled him to his father, and he was recalled.

Meanwhile, Sanga being in concealment and Prithwi Raj in exile, Jaimall was looked upon as the heir-apparent—but not for long. There was in Mewar a pretty girl of marriageable age, named Tara Bai, the daughter of a Rao (chief) who had been driven from his lands by Pathan hordes. The price of her hand was, conquest of the lost domain. Jaimall was willing to attempt it. But of patience he had none, and of wantonness he had enough. His infatuation blinded him. One day he tried to lay rough hands on the girl. The indignant father came to the rescue and killed the prince.

When Prithwi Raj returned from exile, he too sought the hand of Tara Bai. He paid the price demanded, by ousting the Pathans from the territory of the Rao, and won the hand of the beauty. Subsequently Tara Bai, a

veritable Amazon, accompanied her husband with bow and quiver on many a perilous enterprise.

But Prithwi's days also were numbered. He was poisoned, soon after, by his brother-in-law whom he had punished for ill-treating his sister.

So it happened that when Maharana Raimall died, Sanga at last returned to the Chitor Palace, and ascended the vacant throne.

Fair-complexioned, of middle stature, with unusually large eyes, Sangram Singh ruled his kingdom well and made many conquests, till his power extended almost to the gates of Delhi. Sultan Ibrahim Lodi was afraid of him. All Rajasthan hailed him as the supreme, undisputed leader.

The year was 1526. Babar had advanced to Panipat. From the mountain fortresses of Mewar, Sangram Singh watched and dreamed. Let the blood of Mughals mingle freely with the blood of Pathans, he mused. Let the two destroy each other. Then Delhi would have an empty throne. And then? A Hindu ruler of Aryavarta? A Rajput empire? Sangram Singh smiled to himself. And he sent a call to friends and allies : "Prepare !"

Thus wrote the moving finger of Destiny. And the victor of Panipat met, twenty miles from Agra, his most menacing rival.

The prospect was black as an Indian night. The Afghan troops were homesick and depressed. Summer was approaching, and the heat began to tell on them. They heard striking stories of Rajput valour : marvellous horsemanship ; unparalleled wielding of sword and spear ; absolute defiance of death. Fear chilled the Afghans. Their apprehensions were confirmed by preliminary skirmishes and worsened by the forebodings of a Tartar astrologer, an "evil-minded, rascally fellow" (so Babar

wrote of him). Flying sky-high on the balloon of ambition, was the Padshah of Kabul fated to come crashing down on the plains of the Jumna river ?

At this supreme moment Babar rose to the occasion and took a vow, as surprising as it was difficult. He, a confirmed drink addict, a connoisseur of the gay concoctions distilled at the fruitful vineyards of Ghazni and Samarkand, renounced wine for ever !

On the eve of his greatest battle Babar sent for his gold cups and goblets and had them broken into pieces. The store of wine newly received from Ghazni was salted and poured on the earth. It was an act of religious fervour designed to purify the self, and an entry in the Diary said: "O, my soul !

How long wilt thou continue to take pleasure in sin ?  
Repentance is not unpalatable—taste it."

Masses of men are always impressed by the emotional and the dramatic. Eyes narrowed and mouths gaping, the simple rough troops watched (also with a regret perhaps that such good stuff was being wasted) and wondered. When a stirring appeal from their leader followed, they were quickly carried off their feet. Gone were the murmurings of discontent and dread. Self-confidence returned to the men, and they swore by the holy Koran: "O King ! God willing, we will not spare ourselves in sacrifice and devotion, so long as breath and life are in our bodies."

The great battle—a turning point in Indian history—was fought near Agra and ended in complete victory for Babar. This was effected mainly by two factors. One, Babar's use of artillery (mounted on wheeled tripods, tied with each other by means of chains and leather ropes) in combination with cavalry attack. This was the first time that artillery on a large scale was used in India.



Secondly, Babar's so-called *Tulighma* tactics, which he had learned from the great Afghan General Shaibani. Briefly stated, it was as follows: Turn the enemy's flank, then charge simultaneously on front and rear, shooting arrows at top-speed gallop. The packed Rajput formation could not withstand the bottle-neck onslaught that went darting like a spear.

Many a Rajasthan warrior cast in heroic mould lay dead or dying on the fateful Khanua field, to be devoured by hyenas and vultures. The dream of a Hindu Empire was over.

The soldier of fortune from the Ferghana hills was resplendent in the glittering crown of an emperor.

Glory, yes. But what price Glory? The futility of much human endeavour, the tragedy of imperialism is well conveyed in the following words in a letter written by Babar to a friend at home: "The other day they brought me a musk-melon: as I cut it up I felt a deep homesickness, and sense of exile from my land, and I could not help weeping."

## AN EMPEROR WHO DREAMED OF TRUTH

**T**HE image of Akbar's mind, vivid in his deeds and in their record in contemporary chronicles, might well be viewed as a study in rhythmic values. That mind was yoked to conflicting devotions. It should have been puzzled, self-doubting, torn within. Yet it was, in all probability, assured, brilliant at every turn, without strain or tension. It passed from one devotion to another a contrary one, with athletic ease. The inner rhythm altered, but was never lost. Akbar danced away through a many-sided, picturesque life, intricate in design, enormous in range, and his feet never faltered. For within him, he had resolved, with an extraordinary adaptability that nearly amounted to creative genius, the inherent conflicts of two opposed worlds striving to reach altogether different ends.

The contradistinctive aspects of this strange, colourful personality found form in the man of action, explosive, with exhaustless energy, sparing neither himself nor his associates, and the man of contemplation, composed, intellect-ridden, bearing with human frailties though impatient of time-honoured falsehoods, straining towards the Truth of truths.

The man of action was the offspring of fierce ancestors, part Turk, part Mongol, who had built pyramids of human heads as they had trundled through Asia, lashed

by their own restless, barbaric spirit. Filtering through the sands of time and heredity, the old Tartar temperament in its descent upon Akbar had mellowed greatly, without ever losing its incendiary core. Akbar, however, retained the physical gifts of his forbears. Like them he was a great horseman, a splendid hunter and a born warrior.

The battle-field of Panipat had proffered him, when a stripling, a crown of golden thorns. As the years passed the thorns were worn off with ruthless attack. The young Emperor pushed the frontiers of his Indian kingdom beyond the dreams of Babar. He trimmed down the flaming glory of Rajasthan, though in this, the toughest of all his ventures, success was due as much to tact, the policy of divide-and-conquer, as to military genius. He countered the ever-present centrifugal forces in his mammoth empire, giving it unity, peace and the smooth-moving wheels of a stable government. He was the first of the Great Moguls. (I would not call his two predecessors "Great.") He started a tradition. He founded a dynasty unparalleled in all history for power and wealth and splendour, for brilliance and sophistication.

He was also the greatest of the Great Moguls. While the man of action was in harmony with the spirit of his age, the man of contemplation was far in advance of those twisted times, and resolved to straighten them, wielding stark reason to settle problems and cut the roots of established prejudice. Communal inequality was then tearing apart the masses of India from the ruling class. But the religious discrimination sponsored by the State was the bitter fruit not of ideology alone. Islam was being distorted and misused as a convenient weapon of economic exploitation. That was the meaning of *jaziya*, the heavy poll-tax levied on Hindus, a penalty for adherence to their

faith. Akbar, loving justice, removed this imposition. He went further. He shocked the privileged class by throwing open the highest posts in the Empire to merit, regardless of race and creed. So it happened that Hindus came to fill peak posts in the civil administration and military High Command. Hindu strategy won him his battles. Hindu artists under royal patronage made a major contribution to the growth of the art which we call today the Mogul School of Painting.

But the Hindus too knew the heat of Akbar's reforming zeal from the promulgation of the anti-*sati* edict, which prohibited the rite, though permitting it in exceptional circumstances, under official eye.

Mankind since Akbar's time has walked far afield across the rough centuries, picking up progressive social ideas in its stride, so that religious toleration and racial equality do not strike us as revolutionary precepts. (Yet, in practice, has not the face of privilege lingered beneath a pleasing camouflage in our self-deceiving Democracies?) But Akbar should be seen against the setting of his own century. Then alone will his greatness be illuminated.

The later Middle Ages had then oldened and shrivelled. A new age was in its travail. Martin Luther, a symbol of this age, had stirred up revolt against Rome. In the year of Akbar's accession (1556) Mary, Catholic Queen of England and ruthless enemy of Protestantism, was acting on the conviction that to burn down heresy you must burn the heretics. So Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, had to yield his living body to the flames. The year before, Latimer, Bishop of Worcester, had cried as the fire sprang up at his feet: "We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out." Nearly three hundred Protestants were burnt at the stake in three years.

All through the sixties of the century, France was torn by religious strife which swelled swiftly into civil wars. Pope Pius V issued a bull forbidding Huguenots to worship on pain of death, and Catherine de Medici gave it violent expression. The grim outcome was the hideous crime of St. Bartholomew's Day, when the streets of Paris ran with the blood of the Huguenots, taken unawares and massacred before dawn. Other French towns copied this ghastly example. Estimates of the slaughter vary from ten to fifty thousand and more.

The Spanish Empire and the Netherlands trembled under the terror of the Inquisition which sent heretics to death by the hundreds, in the solemn name of religion and of God.

Such was Europe in Akbar's time. A perverted view of their Faith made barbarians of them all! The principle of toleration and universal brotherhood, however, was inherent in ancient Indian culture. Even the thrust of aggressive Brahmanism against the Buddhist *samgha* were unpolluted by mass persecution. They were soul thrusts, not sword-thrusts. It was as though Akbar, the illiterate son of a scholarly father, breathing with his body and spirit the immortal heritage of the land of his adoption, yielded to its age-old enchantment!

Enchantment; indeed. How else explain the spiritual urge, so unexpected in a Mogul Emperor, that led him to frequent and intimate communion with men of all creeds and made him an anxious seeker after Truth?

The beginnings of this vital urge may be traced back to Akbar's early youth. He then rode away into a desert. Abu'l Fazl tells us in *Akbarnama*, a lone melancholy horseman tired of worldly affairs, and in the billowing ocean of greyness, unpursued by space and time, the young Emperor communed with himself. A strange ecstasy pos

sessed him. Later, and all through his life, such mystic experiences—yielding some intuitive realization of Truth—happened off-and-on. Once they inspired him with such keen sympathy for all animal life that he gave up a great hunt which had been arranged. The abandonment of meat foods, too, reflects the intensity of this dreamlike mood, when, in the words of Abū'l Fazl, "The spiritual world seized his holy form and gave it a new beauty.... What the Sufi seers had searched for in vain, was revealed to him."

The outward shell of this religious preoccupation was the House of Worship where leading theologians of many Faiths—Brahmins, Mullahs, Parsees, Jains, Jesuits—were summoned to debate religious tenets in the presence of the Emperor. This was Akbar's training-ground. He held personal discussions, too, with learned men of all sects, and dipped into their scriptures. Illiterate, but gifted with a prodigious memory, he learnt wisdom in the manner of the men of early Vedic times—through the ear.

Hinduism moved him deeply. The outward emblems of this interest were the *tilak* marked on his wide forehead, the *rakki* string tied by Brahmins to his wrist, the *hōm* fire burning in his palace, and his daily worship of the sungod with the prescribed *mantras*. The teachings of the Bible, explained to him by the famous Jesuit Father Aquaviva, moved him no less profoundly, and it seemed that he would turn Christian. But then Zoroastrianism, from the lips of Dastur Meherjee Rana, struck the receptive mind with almost equal force, so that the palace now housed the sacred fire. Jainism, preached by Hiravijaya, also drew homage from the Emperor, who accordingly ordered that no animals were to be killed on certain days. The revealing light of Sufi doctrines made a deep impression on the mystic side of his temperament.

So the Shahin-Shah, having sated his spirit of inquiry at the fount of manifold knowledge, came to this conclusion: Every religion has elements of beauty and vitality and truth. All these truths could be assembled and fused together till they grew into one supreme, central Truth. This was the consummation for which a breathless world, torn by rival factions, waited and prayed. He, Akbar, would fulfil the dream of mankind and evolve a world religion.

No other emperor in history ever set before him so ambitious a vision. The vision took palpable shape as *Din Ilahi*, the Universal Faith. Its founder as well as its high-priest, Akbar personally conducted the ceremony of initiation and revealed to the novice the secret path of everlasting life.

The new super-religion, proclaimed from the Throne with a fanfare of trumpets, stirred no response! It was still-born. The first and last converts were the royal Guru's associates and admirers. That was all.

The causes of this stupendous failure are clear enough. A gay-living royal personage makes a poor figure in a prophet's borrowed mantle. Gautama Buddha could hardly, I believe, have fired the masses with his sermons if he had preached them from the Kapilavastu Palace: the ascetic's dusty garb was a banner that hurried the millions to the Noble Eightfold Path. All through the ages the spirit of India has idealized renunciation. The *sanyasi* has been at the very centre of mass appeal.

Further, *Din Ilahi* was a synthetic product. It was no faith but a formula. It was evolved in the head, not in the heart. Posturing as a creed, it could not evoke credence. The luminaries who clustered about the Emperor's person adopted it by way of a formality, as they adopted the dress and the artificial technique of court

manners, perhaps with a cynical inward smile, regardless of the spiritual implications.

It is a chastening reflection that a poor Moslem weaver, Kabir, himself a disciple of the Hindu teacher Ramand, was a better welder of Hindu-Moslem devotions, and that his figure looms larger in India's religious annals than the majestic personality of the great imperial evangelist. Kabir, a self-eliminating ascetic, added singleness of purpose to his vision. Akbar, however, drank deep from all the bowls of life. The roots of his nature needed exuberance. One sees him striding out of the House of Worship to the vast sports arena where he would subdue wild-tempered elephants—over these beasts he wielded a strange power ! In the dark of night he would shake himself out of the depths of meditation, don a disguise and walk the streets of Delhi, mingling with the common people to feel their thoughts and sentiments, the texture of their daily lives. A thousand interests possessed him. How, then, could he sink himself in *sadhana*, the lone struggle for self-realization?

*Din Ilahi* was, therefore, Akbar's experiment, not his achievement. Was he sincere in its formulation? Was it only a political manoeuvre, designed to unite the empire, solve its racial and communal problems and make the Shahin-Shah, with his professed divine attributes, a luminous being next only to God? It is true that Akbar had a complex personality, a nature of great subtlety as well as depth, so that, with all the copious life-material left by contemporary chroniclers, we have only a twilight knowledge of his true self. However, when one recalls the radiant quality of his spiritual urge, his hunger for ultimate knowledge and his idealism carried boldly into affairs of State, one feels that Akbar, the seeker after Truth, was no glorified impostor, but a sincere inquirer; and yet, a spirit forlorn, dazed and defeated by his dreams, beating ineffectual wings in a void.



## A FORTRESS FALLS

**O**LD soldiers and men who had travelled into distant lands—men who had seen the fortresses of Iran and Turan, of Rum, Europe, and of the whole habitable world, had never beheld the equal of this....In short, the fortress is one of the wonders of the world, and it is impossible to convey an idea of it to anyone who has not seen it."

So wrote the chronicler Faizi Sirhindi, and his statement is borne out by Abu-l-Fazl and by the Jesuit Pierre Du Jarric. The fort was built on a "high, strong" hill, five leagues in circuit and with a plateau of sixty acres on the summit, encircled by a triple line of fortifications which were "like a halo round the moon." There was no other hill nearby commanding the fort, and no way of approach. Level ground stretched all about for miles, and there was no jungle for a besieging army to take cover. The site had every feature that could render a fortress almost impregnable. The natural advantages were strengthened by every means known to builders of strongholds. The artillery (*zarb-zan*) consisted of nearly three thousand (according to another account, 1,800) pieces, "most of which were so large that the noise of their discharge was like terrific thunder." The balls varied in weight from a *sir* to two *mans*. The revenues of several parganas had been earmarked for the unfailing supply of ammunition. There were a great number of mortars

(*hukka-dan*) and catapults (*maujniks*) throwing stones of 1,000 or 2,000 *mans*. On every bastion were large iron cauldrons in each of which twenty or thirty *mans* of oil could be boiled and poured down upon assailants.

There were vast stores of provisions of all kinds : grains, wines, oil, vegetables, wood, aromatic roots, which could support for seven years the 70,000 soldiers defending the fort. Even an unimportant stuff such as opium ran up to five hundred *mans*, Akbar Shahi weight. There were no springs in the mountain fastness, but enormous reservoirs had been constructed to hold rain water sufficient for the needs of the garrison. Each officer of rank had a private reservoir.

Such was Asirgarh, the most formidable fortress in India, and probably in the whole world. It was the glory of Khandesh, the Deccan kingdom, which, as Faizi Sihin-dhi records, had been founded in this curious if incredible way: a soldier of the Farukhi tribe came to Khandesh, then held by certain rajas and zamindars. He chanced upon a village which pleased him. One day his dog set off in pursuit of a hare, but the hare turned round and attacked the animal! This unusual display of daring impressed the soldier, and he decided that a land offering such an extraordinary sight must be unusually fertile in courage, and was well worth living in. Since the zamindar would not allow him to settle down in the village, he collected his tribesmen and took possession of the place by force. Rapidly he extended his sway over several *parganas*. But it was left to his grandson to build up the kingdom of Khandesh, 150 *kos* in length and 50 in breadth. This ruler also laid the foundations of the fort of Asirgarh. Generations of kings added to the strength of the fort for two centuries, sparing neither money nor labour.

But Asirgarh commanded the highway from Hindusthan to the Deccan. When Akbar was planning to add to his many titles that of Emperor of the South, that fortress, perched 900 feet high on an enormous mass of rock, loomed blackly on the path of his ambition.

He sent an envoy to Khandesh. Bahadur Khan was then King. Not long before, he had come out of prison and ascended the throne. It was an established custom among the rulers of Khandesh that the reigning monarch should keep all his relations in confinement, so that there might be no attempt to seize power. The unhappy members of the royal family with their wives and children passed nearly all their lives behind prison walls. Bahadur Khan had been a captive for thirty years and had no knowledge of government. To make up for lost time he plunged headlong into dissipation !

He was bewildered by Akbar's demand of homage. He received the envoy with respect and acknowledged allegiance to Delhi, but he would not agree to pay the Emperor a visit. "I will send my son to His Majesty with suitable offerings," he pleaded. But his wavering disposition was interpreted as a cloak for treacherous designs. Akbar would make no compromise. Abject surrender was the price of his protection. Down came a great army led by the famous chronicler Abu-l-Fazl himself. In a while Akbar arrived to take over command.

The besieging troops sheltered themselves in trenches. The fort kept up a constant fire all day and night, often without any object. It could afford to waste ammunition. "In the dark nights of the rainy season," Faizi Sirhindi writes, "no man dared to raise his head, and a demon even would not move about."

The Governor of the fort, strangely enough, was an Abyssinian, stricken with years and getting blind, yet of

a heroic mould. He was as brave as the King was timid; and it grieved him when within a month of the siege, Bahadur Khan sent out his mother and son to the Mughal Camp begging to be forgiven. The only condition however that Akbar would accept was Bahadur Khan's complete surrender.

Yet Akbar had little chance of capturing the great fort. His army chiefs reported that however long they might press the siege, nothing but a miracle would effect capture. The steep cliffs of Asirgarh were so well defended that the Mughals could not approach close enough to take them by storm. The technique employed at Chitor, advance by means of *sabat* (sap and mine) was useless here. The Moghul army was weak in artillery. The defenders, on the contrary, had excellent guns manned by expert Portuguese officers. In vain did Akbar invest the fort with 2,00,000 soldiers.

He tried to secure a siege-train from the Portuguese of Goa and appealed to Father Xavier who had come out with the Mughal army. But, as Du Jarric records; "The Father replied that His Majesty had commanded him a thing that he could not perform; for it was not lawful for him to ask this of the Portuguese, or to counsel them to such a step, for to do so would be a direct violation of the Christian law."

Suddenly Asirgarh was faced with an enemy far more destructive than Mughal gun-fire. An epidemic broke out in the garrison, due possibly to the penning-up of more than 10,000 animals in the fortress.

The disease caused paralysis of the extremities from the waist downwards, and also attacked the eyes. Abu-l Fazl records that 25,000 men died of it. (Firishta puts the figure at 40,000.) While the man-power of the fort dwindled deplorably, Akbar succeeded in capturing one

of the triple lines of fortification commanding the main defences. Disheartened by these calamities Bahadur Khan made overtures of peace. Muqarab Khan, the son of the Abyssinian Governor, was sent to the Mughal camp with the offer that if the fort was restored and the prisoners released Bahadur would hasten to submit. Akbar accepted the proposal. The gates of the fort opened for some moments, and Bahadur descended from the hill; arriving at the Mughal camp, "he rubbed his forehead on the threshold of fortune, and obtained deliverance from his various sorrows."

Queer was the way of this "deliverance from sorrows." While making obeisance to the Emperor, he was dragged down by a Mughal officer and forced to touch the ground with his nose! He was not allowed to return to his fort. The siege continued.

But the key to the fortress was Malik Yaqub, the old Abyssinian Governor. Akbar attempted bribery, and the offer was turned down with scorn. "Money and presents, the most effective engines for bombarding forts or capturing kingdoms," had their effect, however, on lesser spirits. Finding the lion's skin useless, writes Du Jarrie, Akbar "changed it for that of the fox." The majority of the defenders yielded to the shots more powerful than cannon-balls. Truly had Philip, King of Macedon, said that he could capture with ease the strongest fortress provided that a mule laden with gold could enter it.

A curious custom at Asirgarh was that seven princes of the blood royal should always be in its vicinities ready to assume the kingship in turn. Malik Yaqub assembled them and said: "The fortress is as it was, and the garrison is as it was. Which of you will accept the throne and protect the honour of your fathers?" Not one of them answered. The listless eyes of the old Abyssinian

commander moved from face to face. Then the anxiety in them hardened into a glint of fury. "Would to God that ye were women!" he cried scornfully. Presently, Muqarab Khan returned from Akbar's camp, and on him Malik Yakub vented his wrath: "May God not show me thy face. Go down to Bahadur and follow him." The young man, deeply shamed, went back to the Mughal camp, and in the presence of Abu-l Fazl and the amirs he stabbed himself in the belly with his dagger.

There was a constitutional deadlock. Asirgarh had an empty throne; no one would venture to sit on it and risk his life. The Captains of the garrison had bartered away their honour. Heavy lay the shadow of treachery on Asirgarh. The fort was doomed. The broken-hearted Abyssinian, the one man who had scorned at Mughal gold, decided that life was an empty bubble, and the sooner you broke it the better. The fort would fall, but he, the commander, would not live to see the evil day. Malik Yaqub made his will, bathed himself, and had his shroud brought. He summoned his family, went to the mosque and prayed, distributed benefits, gave alms. "Dig a grave," he ordered his men, indicating a chosen spot, and took a fatal dose of opium.

The defenders were now free to surrender the impregnable fort. The keys were handed over. 34,000 persons, writes Abu-l Fazl, streamed out of the gates. Their lives were spared. The siege had lasted eleven months, and during this time nearly 70,000 men had subsisted on the stored provisions. Yet, when the fort fell, the quantities of grain, oil, etc., still left over were enormous, as though the stores had never been touched.

Curiously, Akbar was enraged to learn that seven Portuguese gunners in the fort had become Muhammadans! He would have punished the apostates severely but

for the expostulations of Father Xavier who "straight-way applied himself to the saving of their souls (writes Du Jarric), and it pleased our Saviour to vouchsafe to him the happiness of winning all the seven captains to the Christian faith." Many half-caste Portuguese children "born amongst the thorny paths of Paganism and Mahometanism," were baptised. Besides, the souls of over seventy others were saved, including that of a Jew, ninety years of age. "God at last shed the light of heaven upon him." The happy lot of an infant is worthy of note. A servant of Father Xavier found her at Asirgarh, lying like a carrion on a dunghill. She was brought to the Father and baptised. She survived this only for a day, and then "went to join the company of the blessed in paradise."

[The material in these pages is a subject of controversy. The available sources are, on the one hand, the Muslim chronicles of Abu-l Fazl and Faizi Sirhindi, and the *Zafar-al-walikh*—an Arabic history of Gujarat; on the other hand, the Jesuit letters and reports shaped into a readable account by the Frenchman Pierru Du Jarric. The two stories often contradict each other. Vincent Smith accepts the latter sources as offering the "most authentic history of the events which led to the capitulation of Asirgarh," while denouncing the Muslim chronicles as deliberate forgeries. That view is thoroughly biassed, and unsupported by internal evidence. In this article I have drawn freely from both the sources and aimed at coherence.]

## PIRATES FROM ARAKAN

**M**IDNIGHT on the Meghna. The dark river mingled with the sky, gloom upon gloom. The village lay tucked in sleep. In daytime it was a monochrome in green, with long stretches of growing corn, bamboos, banana clumps, toddy-palms. Ponds were everywhere. With each pond as the central feature was a loose cluster of mud-walled cottages topped by conical straw-padded roofs. And somewhere was the inevitable gray old temple, housing a god, or a goddess, of the people.

A typical Bengal village. Floods of invasion had swept over Hindusthan, but the Bengal village, shielded by space, was seldom touched, seldom molested. It breathed peace. It made worship to the heritage of a remote past. It evolved certain democratic forms even if it lay squeezed in the framework of feudal economy.

Upon this village of Bengal came Terror. Terror unknown in all its history.

A dog barked suddenly in the moonless dark. Another. In a moment a dozen dogs were barking hard, pouring alarm. Some more moments passed. A dismal voice was heard crying out, "The Feringhees! The Feringhees come, the Feringhees!" Shrieks crossed the village, end to end. Men darted out madly with women and children, flying through the night into the fields, hiding in ditches and thickets and behind the waving corn. A few breathless minutes, and the village lay deserted, dead.



Then the flames rose, tall leaping flames spitting spirals of thick smoke. Bamboo poles crackled and split, scattering sparks. Thatches of straw shrivelled into ashes over nude skeletons of clay walls.

Far in the fields the wide-eyed refugees gaped at the Terror.

And the Terror stalked. Torchlights were trailing to the fields, burning away the gloom. There was much else to be looted, more precious than household goods!

A helpless shriek. Presently the fields were loud with shrieks. "Death, give me death, O God!" screamed a woman. Another woman wailed hysterically, dragged by rough strong hands. An infant whimpered, wrenched from its mother's breast, stopping when the little head was smashed against a tree-trunk.

The Feringhees were men from Portugal, sea-dogs who sailed their boats far from their native shores in quest of loot, and not content with the goods they could trade or seize, they captured men and women, selling them off as slaves.

Portugal had had her days of glory. Through the brilliant seamanship and enterprise of her great sailors, she had made the ocean her limitless highway, revealing to Europe's amazed vision rich new worlds that were far older than Europe itself. Prince Henry the Navigator, Bartholomew Diaz, Vasco da Gama, Francisco de Almeida and Albuquerque, among others, made Portugal mistress of the Eastern oceans and opened up to her the golden possibilities of world commerce.

Even in their days of eager enterprise and glory, the Portuguese had been pioneers of the slave trade. While exploring the western coast of Africa they realized the profits that could be made out of human cargoes; and they set out to kidnap the sturdy, simpleminded primitives of

the African lands, selling shiploads of them to the white planters in the West Indies and the southern American colonies, the economic exploitation of which depended on a vast supply of field labour.

It was an evil day when groups of Portuguese pirates went farther afield, sailed up the Bay of Bengal and reached the shores of Arakan, where they met a kindred spirit in the Magh (a semi-Mongoloid race) ruler. An unholy alliance followed.

Chittagong became the base of operations for the systematic plunder of Bengal. Situated at the mouth of great waterways, it dominated access to a vast net-work of streams and inlets. Riding these waterways in light galleys the Portuguese ravaged the villages of lower Bengal and often penetrated forty or fifty leagues up country. Attacking at night, they surprised and carried away the entire population of villages. Sometimes they came on market days when plunder in men and goods was ample. Or else they pounced down when people were assembled for a marriage or some other festivity. Often the joyous smile of a bride turned to stark horror as she was snatched away from the *alpana*-painted board where she sat before the Holy Stone.

"They carried off," writes the Muslim chronicler, "Hindus and Muslims, male and female, great and small, few and many, that they could seize, pierced the palms of their hands, passed canes through the holes, and threw them one above another under the deck of their ships. In the same manner as grain is flung to fowl, every morn and evening they threw down from above uncooked rice to the captives as food. On their return to their homes, they employed the few that survived in tillage and other hard tasks, with great disgrace and insult. Others were sold...at the ports of the Deccan."

A great slave-market sprang up near Baleshwar in the Orissa coast. The local slave-dealers, fearing mischief, would not let the pirates, who came sailing down, land with their human cargo; they sent an agent on deck to make the purchase. "Many highborn persons, many Sayyad women, were compelled to undergo the disgrace of slavery or concubine of these wicked men," says the Muslim chronicler. "Bengal daily became more and more desolate, less and less able to resist and fight them. Not a householder was left on both sides of the rivers from Dacca to Chitagaon."

Bernier writes: "They had the audacity to offer for sale, in the places which they had recently ravaged, the aged people whom they could turn to no better account. It was usual to see young persons who had saved themselves by timely flight endeavouring to-day to redeem the parent who had been made captive yesterday....The pirates, infamous scoundrels, boast that they make more Christians in a twelve-month than all the missionaries of the Indies do in ten years. A strange mode, this, of propagating our holy religion by the constant violation of its most sacred precepts, and by the open contempt and defiance of its most awful sanctions."

The Mughal Empire of Jahangir and Shah Jahan with all its immense resources tolerated this running sore in Bengal. The province was too far, and its administration inept. The Bengal fleet was in mortal dread of the pirates. Even a flotilla of a hundred Mughal warships dared not face three or four Portuguese boats. If they sighted the enemy from a distance they fled: if they were pressed close, "rowers, sepoys and armed men alike threw themselves without delay into the water, preferring drowning to captivity."

But at last the pirates overstepped the limit. One

of their Captains, Diego da Sa, captured a Mughal lady of high rank. She was escaping in a covered cart with her daughter and daughter-in-law when the Captain overtook her and tried to violate her honour. The incident was reported to Delhi. The Empress Mumtaj Mahal took notice of it. She remembered the misdeeds of another Portuguese who had carried away two of her slave-girls, and her anger blazed.

"Destroy them!" the Queen ordered.

An army of a hundred thousand troops with 600 boats and 90 elephants advanced by land and water towards Hugli, an important pirate settlement. The Mughal artillery spat fire. The Portuguese replied with light cannon and moved down the troops as they advanced. The prestige of the Empire was at stake. The Commander Inayatullah was deeply worried. The defection of the Indian boatmen in Portuguese pay restored his spirits, and he proceeded to lay mines in a ditch skirting the settlement. Two of the mines were discovered by the enemy and rendered harmless, but a third exploded and shattered the garrison. The pirate nest was destroyed! The men were killed or captured. Ten thousand lives were lost in the struggle, and 4,400 Portuguese and half-castes, of both sexes, seized. Thousands of slaves were set free.

The prisoners were sent to Delhi. "Even the children, priests and monks," writes Bernier, "shared the universal doom. The handsome women as well married as single became inmates of the *seraglio*; those of a more advanced age or of inferior beauty were distributed among the *Omrahs*; little children underwent the rite of circumcision and were made pages; and the men of adult age, allured for the most part by fair promises, or terrified by the daily threat of being thrown under the feet of elephants, renounced the Christian Faith."

Even after the fall of Hugli the pirates carried on their ravages from Chittagong. A new base was formed in the Sandip Islands where a notorious monk named Fra Joan began to reign as a petty king. But Shaista Khan, the Governor of Bengal, forced the pirates into submission. The Magh King of Arakan was routed, too, and his land seized.

With Portuguese piracy went Portuguese trade. The path to Bengal was cleared for British merchants.

The British, meanwhile, had inherited the trans-Atlantic traffic in slaves, and, as Professor Coupland has written, they "soon acquired, once in it, the lion's share." "At the period of the American Revolution about fifty per cent. of the slaves were carried in British ships.... Slavery became an accepted institution in the British Empire. The number of slaves on British soil across the Atlantic steadily increased.... At one time there was even a danger of slavery taking root in England; for a custom grew up among the planters of bringing their domestic slaves with them when they came home for a holiday or on retirement."

"Economics smothered ethics," comments Professor Coupland.

## SHAH JAHAN'S FAVOURITE DAUGHTER

**H**ER name was Jahanara. She was the eldest daughter of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan.

How handsome she was! The chiselled features, the bright eyes and clear ivory complexion—these she had inherited from her mother. Mental accomplishments—interest in art and literature, joy in things of beauty—these she had inherited from the spirit of the times. But there were certain other virtues that were entirely her own: generosity, charity, sympathy for the poor. A good number of widows and orphans lived on her donations. The Mughal Empire was loud with acclamation for her acts of kindness.

The *harem* of a Mughal palace with its hundreds, even thousands, of women—wives, mistresses, slave-girls, dancing beauties, eunuchs, armed Tartar guards—was seldom the home of peace and harmony. The air was thick with jealousy. Quarrels often broke out. But the gracious lady Jahanara was well-versed in the art of healing discords. When her mother died she took upon herself the hard task of managing this strange world that was at once highly sexed and sexless. Her devotion to her father and her father's love for her reached extraordinary lengths. The chroniclers state frankly that their attachment for each other, after the death of Mumtaz, was blended with crime. Shah Jahan, the old voluptuary, who

revelled in dancing-girls and gloated in sensual pleasures, was, I am inclined to think, not entirely incapable of perversion. But how can one indulge in an anatomy of Jahanara's filial passion?

Shah Jahan placed unbounded confidence in his favourite child—so much so that she became next to the Emperor the most important person in the Mughal Court. She made weighty decisions. Many political negotiations rested in her hands. High officials flattered her. Diplomats from many lands came to pay her respect—and to do busnss. Rich presents copiously flowed in. Shah Jahan himself was unusually lavish in his gifts to her. On one occasion he gave her thirty lakhs of rupees. And Shah Jahan was a confirmed miser!

She took great care of him. She watched over his safety. The old man lived in perpetual dread of being poisoned: so Jahanara never permitted a dish to appear on the royal table unless it had been prepared under her personal supervision. She tried to keep him happy and cheerful, relieving him of anxiety and fatigue by means of her sweet disposition and varied accomplishments. When, in the imbecility of age, Shah Jahan was a captive in the hands of his wily son Aurangazib, Jahanara shut herself out from the world and voluntarily shared her father's woe, consoling him, looking after his comforts, doing her best to let in a little sunshine into his life's gloom. Such conduct was unique in the Mughal Imperial family. Love for one's father was the exception rather than the rule in the pitiless, unemotional Mughal annals.

But what about her own happiness? Was there not a longing in her too for the love of a man other than her father—a longing for husband, home and child?

This youthful lady of much vivacity was, like the other women in the *harem* at Agra Fort, a captive stand-

ing by a trellised window and watching the stream of life flow by. Armed guards stood at every wall, barring the slightest divergenec of that stream. Jahanara might as well have been an ugly woman. She would have been happier as one of common origin. She burnt in her own loveliness. Her youth was not her adornment, but her burden.

She eagerly cultivated the friendship of her brother Dara Shikoh, the heir-apparent, and made him promise that when he ascended the throne he would grant her permission to marry. Does not the extortion of such a strange promise throw light into the workings of Jahanara's mind, her secret desires and dreams? Bernier, a French physician travelling in India during Shah Jahan's reign, thought this pledge a remarkable one, since the marriage of a princess in Hindustan was a rare occurrence. No man was considered worthy of wedding into the Imperial family. There was also the fear, that the husband, of a royal princess might become powerful and aspire to the crown.

Jahanara's own dearly beloved father would not allow her to marry, or even to have a lover. She was to stay in her golden cage, loaded with stones that shone and were valued at many lakhs of rupees, and loaded also with power. She had all that a woman liked: but not that for which a woman craved.

"Love adventures are not attended with the same danger in Europe as in Asia," writes the physician-traveller I have just named. "In France they excite only merriment; they create a laugh and are forgotten: but in this part of the world few are the instances in which they are not followed by some dreadful and tragical catastrophe." He proceeds to relate anecdotes of Jahanara's love affairs, assuring us (and he is a reliable source of



information) that they are "not romance, but matter of history."

Though guarded in the *harem* like other women, Jahanara succeeded once in a while in having young men smuggled into her chambers. Bribery was the main instrument in hand. At one time the princess used to be visited by a young man of no exalted rank. In the Mughal *harem* walls had ears. There were women who bitterly envied the Princess. And it was not long before word reached Shah Jahan about the ill-conduct of his daughter.

Shah Jahan acted quickly. It was the dead of night. The palace was asleep, save for the Tartar women, who stood guard at doors and passages, statue-like, sword in hand. Suddenly at the entrance to the Begum Saheb's (that was how Jahanara was called) suite, there appeared the Emperor himself! The Tartar guard, surprised by his appearance at such an unexpected hour, raised her hand in salute and cried out, "His Majesty!" Other guards, equally taken by surprise, repeated the intimation according to palace custom: "His Majesty!"

Jahanara sat up in bed and listened. Fear sprang in her eyes. "Up, quick!" said her trembling voice. "Hide somewhere." And wildly she looked about. Her frightened companion stumbled after her. In the attached bath-room there was a huge cauldron used for heating the water. The young gallant took refuge inside it. Then the King came. His face showed neither surprise nor displeasure. He talked a while with his daughter on ordinary topics, as though nothing was amiss. Presently, he finished the conversation by observing that the state of her skin indicated a neglect of her customary ablutions and that it was proper she should bathe. He then commanded the eunuchs to light a fire under the cauldron. He watched the cruel murder until the attendants gave

him to understand that the wretched victim was no more.

At a subsequent period, Jahanara formed another attachment which also ended tragically. She chose for her *khansama* (steward) a Persian noble named Nazir Khan, a handsome and accomplished youth, full of spirit and ambition, the favourite of the whole Court. Jahanara's uncle Shaista Khan esteemed the man highly, and, aware of his niece's feelings, ventured to propose him as her husband.

This was the ruin of Nazir Khan. Shah Jahan had already suspected improper relations between him and the Princess. His jealousy was roused to fever heat, but he showed no outward signs of it. One day, in Court, as a mark of singular favour he presented Nazir with the customary *pan* (betel). This youth received his Monarch's offer gratefully, and put it in his mouth. Little did he imagine that he had received poison from the hand of the smiling Emperor. Rapt in dreams of future bliss, dreams of Jahanara, he withdrew from the palace and got into his palanquin. Even before he reached home he was dead.

On the night of March 26, 1644, a terrible accident happened in the Imperial residence at Agra Fort. Princess Jahanara had passed the evening in her father's company. At night while she was proceeding from her father's chambers to her own, her skirt fell on one of the candles lighting the passage. The dress was a marvel of fine muslin, richly perfumed with essences. In a moment Jahanara was wrapped in flames. She shrieked. Her maids, four of them, flung themselves on her and tried to smother the flames with their bodies; but the fire spread to their own skirts and they were forced in agony to release her. Jahanara's back, sides and arms were dreadfully burnt.

Four months she lay in bed, the ghost of her former self, groaning in pain and fighting death. The Physician Royal at the Mughal Court, Hakim Mumana, tried in vain to heal her horrible wounds. Medical men from far and near gathered at the Capital. Their efforts were futile. However, by a lucky chance, the celebrated physician of the King of Persia, fleeing from his master's wrath, reached Agra only three weeks after the accident. His medicine afforded the Princess some relief, and removed her fever. But the wounds did not heal.

It was a crisis in Shah Jahan's life. Never before, not even at the death of Mumtaz, had he known such emotional strain. He retired from all affairs of State and sat on his daughter's sick-bed, night and day, applying the medicines with his own hand. From evening to midnight, with tears in his eyes he poured out fervent prayers. Every night a purse of Rs. 1,000 was placed under Jahanara's pillow and was given away in the morning to the poor, so that their prayers might help her recovery.

Never in Mughal history had so much commotion been caused by the illness of a woman. Two of Jahanara's maids, though less severely burnt, had died. Jahanara continued in a critical condition.

Time passed. At last a slave named Arif prepared an ointment that healed her sores. Where the medical science of the time had failed, quackery succeeded. But it was over a year before the Princess was completely cured.

The grateful father had the slave weighed and gave him the equivalent of his weight in gold. Always parsimonious (except in the making of things of beauty), for once he became a spendthrift. Two lakhs of rupees were given away to the poor. Huge sums were distributed

among officials and nobles. Jahanara received jewellery worth ten lakhs. And the slave Arif was given, besides his weight in gold, robes of honour, horses and elephants.

The mishap to Jahanara was the occasion for an event of historical interest. Aurangzib, Governor of the Decan, came to Agra to see his sister in sick-bed, and three weeks after his arrival he was discharged from service and deprived of his rank and *jagir*. It was rumoured that Shah Jahan had punished his son because he had assumed the life of a *fakir*, so unbecoming of a provincial Governor. But the real reason of Aurangzib's disgrace was the jealousy of Dara who poisoned Shah Jahan's mind against the younger brother.

Never did Aurangzib forgive Dara for this intrigue. Six months he remained an unemployed man. When Jahanara recovered, she in her graciousness pleaded with Shah Jahan and had her brother restored to office.

Mumtaj Mahal sleeps under the most beautiful and expensive memorial in the world—one that is a wonder of architectural creation. Her daughter Jahanara wished that a simple memorial be placed upon her grave, with this epitaph :

*“ Cover not my grave save with green grass.*

*For such covering alone befits the tomb of the lowly in spirit.”*

## THE BLOOD OF A MARTYR

**I**T happened on the Jumna bank at Delhi. The river was one great mass of white painted luxury boats. The elite of the Mughal Empire were returning from their Friday prayer at the Juma Masjid. Not a strain of music came from the boats, not a gleam of colour was visible. The All Highest of the land hated colour, music, gaiety. His stark puritanism revelled in ascetic simplicity.

When the boats drew up at the bank, out of the foremost of them emerged a lean, bearded man wearing a bejewelled turban but no other ornament suggestive of rank. And as he alighted, a piece of brick came flying in the air, narrowly missed his head and rolled away into the river. Instantly there was commotion. "Aye Aye Alamgir!" shouted a hundred voices. The armed guards plunged forward and dragged out from among the crowd a sturdy youth with blazing blood-shot eyes, who shook his fists and shouted: "God's curse on thee, oh butcher-king, oh Aurangzib!"

A brick had been aimed at the holy person of the Mughal Emperor of Hindustan. It was a gesture of bitter hatred. The man who threw the brick was a Sikh. He wanted vengeance.

Tegh Bahadur, the fourth Guru of the Sikhs, believed that he could bring about a change of heart in the Emperor and make him withdraw his policy of religious persecution. He proceeded to Delhi for an audience with

the Great One. On his way he was seized by Mughal troops and thrown into a cell. When he was brought to court, the Emperor asked him insultingly to perform some miracle in proof of the alleged divinity of his mission.

"The duty of man is to pray to the Lord, and not to show tricks of magic," Tegh Bahadur answered. "Yet, since thou biddest me, I shall do this: I shall write a charm, and the sword shall fall harmless on the neck around which it is hung."

He wrote the charm on a bit of paper, placed it around his own neck, and bent his head to the executioner. The Court watched breathlessly. Down came a blow and the head was severed. On the paper was written: "*Sir dia, sirr na dia.*"—"I gave my head, but not my secret.")

The corpse was paraded in the streets of Delhi. The Sikhs gasped with horror. But the blood of Tegh Bahadur was not shed in vain. Out of it sprang a new military power.

The founder of the Sikh religion was Nanak, a man of the trader caste, born in 1469. From early youth he sought the company of wandering holy men, stirred by a deep curiosity about God, the value of meditation, and the meaning of life. He studied the Vedas as well as the Koran, and pondered over the teachings of Kabir, with whom he had a close kinship of spirit. He travelled to far places, visited holy cities, in solitude, and reflected.

In Mecca, he was one day found sleeping with his feet towards the mosque. Angrily, the priests demanded of him: "How dare you dishonour the House of the Lord?" And he replied: "Tell me, is it possible to turn my feet where the House of God is not?"

At the end of his wanderings, he began to preach a new Faith that sought to create a synthesis between Hin-

duism and Islam. There was truth in all religions, he said, God was one,—“the True, the Immortal, the Self-existent, the Pure, the Invisible.” He was the *Akalpurik*, Timeless Being. The way to him lay not through set prayers, but through the shaping of one’s conduct, self-restraint and the searching of the heart. He who remained bright amid darkness (Anjan), unmoved amid deceit (Maya), perfect amid temptation, should attain happiness. Life was as the shadow of the passing bird, but the soul of man was like the potter’s wheel, ever circling on its pivot.

There was no fundamental clash of aim between the Hindû and the Muslim, Nanak preached. In a world of communal passions these words sounded false and eclectic. Equally eclectic was the dress that Nanak wore—a mixture of Hindu and Muslim religious costumes. A necklace of bones hung round his neck. A saffron mark in Hindu style adorned his forehead. There was nothing sectarian about him. He spoke in a manner quiet and simple, but inspired, and full of a hidden fire that smouldered in the depths of his soul.

Not long after Nanak’s death the spiritual leadership of the community became hereditary. The Guru was believed to be a “treasury of miraculous power”, and began to be worshipped. He moved with royal splendour, surrounded by courtiers, took several wives (when Har Rai, the 7th Guru was a boy of nine, he was “wedded collectively” to all the daughters of a disciple) and assumed the title of Padshah, Emperor.

But it was not the pretensions of the Sikh spiritual leader that drew upon the community the wrath of Aurangzib. The Mughal Emperor was too bigoted to allow an aggressive Faith other than Islam to make conversions on a large scale. When the Guru encouraged

the Hindus of Kashmir to resist forcible conversion to Islam, Aurangzib declared this to be treason to the throne.

So it happened that Tegh Bahadur was seized, ordered to embrace Islam, tortured for five days, and finally beheaded.

A cry of horror rose in the Punjab. It was clear that a reorientation of the Sikh view of life was essential. "Fight with no weapon save the word of God," Nanak had said. But the new situation imposed a new task. The Sikh community could not preserve itself from utter destruction unless it took up arms *en masse*. A military machine had to be built responding quickly to the hand that worked it. This was the ideal that inspired Tegh Bahadur's son, Govind. When his father died a martyr Govind was in his fifteenth year. He retired for safety to the hills by the Jumna river, hunted tigers and wild beasts, and in between the hours of pastime he brooded over his father's violent end and the degraded condition of his community, and stored his mind with legends on the ancient glories of his race.

Twenty years passed by. Govind raised his battle standard. He set about the dangerous task of avenging his own and his country's wrongs by rousing the Sikhs to a new life and subverting the Mughal Empire.

The status of spiritual leadership made his task possible. Nanak had said that the Guru must be faithfully obeyed. Bhai Gurudas was even more explicit. "The Sikh who receiveth the Guru's instruction is really a Sikh. To become a disciple is, as it were, to become dead. A disciple must be like a purchased slave, fit to be yoked to any work which may save his Guru. Love none but the Guru : all other love is false.

Blind devotion was the price that the Sikhs willingly paid. It is said that a certain Guru praised a parrot,



and a Sikh at once went to the owner and offered his wife and daughter in exchange for the bird. Their unquestioning devotion was the root of a stern discipline which Govind sought to utilise for a military purpose.

In the secluded hills of North Punjab, Govind drilled his followers and established the *Khalsa* (the Liberated). All, he commanded, must become as one. The *Khalsa* must be monolithic in structure, in which the most lowly were equal with the highest. The key-words were, *Kritinash*, *Kulnash*, *Dharmnash*, *Karmnash*,—the forsaking of occupation and family, of belief and rites. “Do thus and the world is yours,” he said. Having abolished social distinctions, he devised a form of initiation—the sprinkling of water on the novitate by five of the faithful. The Sikhs were commanded to honour the memory of Nanak, to bow to nought visible save the *Adi Granth* (the Holy Book), to greet each other with the exclamation, “Wah Guru !” (“Hail Guru”) to wear their hair uncut, and to devote their energies to arms.

The Sikhs had travelled far from the teaching of Nanak. Govind lived like a prince, and had bodyguards who were provided with arrows tipped with gold. There was nothing spiritual in his aim. “I have been considering how I may confer empire on the *Khalsa*,” he said. “I shall make lions out of men of all four castes, and destroy the *Mughals*.”

“War to Aurangzib !” went the cry, to the thunderous sound of a huge battle-drum. Recruits flocked to the Sikh banner, received baptism, and a religious war started. By his foolish policy Aurangzib had made an enemy of Shivaji in the Deccan. And Govind was the Shivaji of the Punjab !

He suffered terribly. His sons were killed in battle. But he had fired the imagination of the Sikhs and brought

a resurgence of national life. The blood of Tegh Bahadur fertilised the soil for the rise of heroes. But it was the genius of Govind that yoked the available valour to a specific purpose. The death of Aurangzib brought about a truce between the Sikhs and the Mughals.

Guru Govind fell in his forty-eighth year under the dagger of an assassin. In a moment of heat he had struck down an Afghan horse-dealer who had insulted him with an angry gesture. The sons of the victim awaited an opportunity for revenge, and stabbed him fatally while he was asleep. Govind sprang up and the assassins were seized. He heard them justify their act of retribution, and said: "They have avenged their father and done their duty. Release them and injure them not."

## THE MAKER OF MAHARASHTRA

**V**ICTORY shall be yours !” murmured Jija Bai, as the young Maratha chief, ready to set forth on his perilous mission, bent his head reverentially to the feet of his mother.

Chain armour was lined inside his clothes. A skull cap of steel lay fitted under his turban. In his right sleeve was a slim dagger, and attached to the fingers of his left hand was a curious weapon, *baghnakh*, claws of steel, held by a pair of rings. He was arrayed for a peace conference !

Son of a jagirdar, he had let his thoughtful gaze wander over the jungle-clad but sterile rockland out of which his kinsmen, a brave, active, hard-living race, drew precarious succour ; and he had gazed across at the plains beyond, where kingdoms rose and fell. The surge of Muslim power had paused practically at the edge of the rocks, even if rival Sultans claimed possession of the Ghats and pursued a policy of anti-Hindu intolerance. Not that the young Maratha chief was stirred, at this moment of his fateful career, by the dream of a past century, the dream to set up a Hindu Raj. His ambitions were personal. Later, as the struggle grew, ideals took root. Yet, even in the early days when young Shivaji was shaping his devoted comrades into a single-purposed monolithic army, he listened to the words of Brahmans and the teachings of his saintly mother.

A famous Muslim commander had come marching with well-equipped troops, commissioned by the Queen-Regent of Bijapur, a veiled woman, to capture alive or dead "the mountain rat." He had boasted that he would seize the rebel without even once dismounting from his horse. On his way he committed atrocities on helpless Brahmans. He destroyed the images of their gods. He had the stone limbs of a far-famed goddess smashed and ground into dust. Yet, perhaps a secret fear lay in Afzal's heart. If legend is to be trusted, he had, before he set out on his campaign, thrown all his wives—63 of them—into a pool of water and built them 63 tombs of the same size, row by row, as a sort of pre-dated *sati*, lest he fall in battle ! Anyhow, a clash of arms was to be avoided, if possible.

"I bring thee a promise of pardon," Afzal Khan sent word. "I undertake to wield my influence at Court to that effect. You shall be left free to enjoy your possessions. You shall be honoured at Court."

Shivaji was not deceived. His own agents brought him the true version of the Khan's motives. Shiva was not one to trust to chance. He seemingly fell in with Afzal's proposal, and invited him to a selected spot in the depths of the jungle at the foot of the Maratha stronghold of Pratapgarrh, and on the appointed day he massed his troops in bands behind bushes and thickets.

Afzal entered the forest with more than a thousand of his musketeers, but left them some distance away, as arranged, approaching Shivaji with only two bodyguards. His sword hung from his belt, but Shiva seemed totally unarmed. Afzal smiled with self-satisfaction. The rat had quietly stepped into the trap ! Afzal came forward with outstretched, friendly arms. Big-built, he towered over the short Maratha figure. Then one arm tightened

round Shivaji's neck like a vice, and the other flew to a dagger. Afzal struck hard, hacking in vain at the hidden armour! Shivaji gasped, strangled. He pulled himself together before strength ebbed, and with his *baghnakh* he clawed and tore at his assailant's bowels. As the strangling hold on his neck slackened, he struck Afzal with the dagger concealed in his sleeve.

It all happened in the space of a few breaths. The wounded man reeled, screaming "Murder!" One of his bodyguards struck Shivaji on the head with a long sword. The steel cap held the blow. The bodyguards on either side hacked sword with sword. Afzal lost his life. Shivaji then rushed up the hill-path to his fortress and fired a cannon. At this signal his troops emerged from hiding and fell upon the surprised Muslims. It was a massacre. A few survivors escaped, begging for mercy, as the record goes, "with grass between their teeth."

The incident has more than passing significance. Not only had Shivaji staggered back from the edge of death. He had received a spiritual experience. He had been strengthened within, strengthened for struggle. Victory from this moment was his, victory not only over his Muslim foe, but over his own people. He had fired their imagination. He had laid the foundations of Maharashtra on a psychological basis of unity. No wonder that minstrels sang of him in hill and plain till he became a national hero and a legend.

Bijapur lay broken. But the path of conquest led to a foe far more deadly than Bijapur—Mughal imperialism, uncoiling itself into the Deccan like an enormous python.

Aurangzib, pursuing his policy of annexation at any cost, saw quickly the growing menace of a unified, inspired, freedom-seeking Maharashtra. And he took instant action. A vast army, stiffened with siege artillery and

led by the Emperor's uncle, the *Amirul-Umara* Shaista Khan, advanced southwards, forcing back the Marathas by sheer weight of numbers. Shivaji harassed the Mughals by guerilla warfare. He attacked their lines of supply. His strongholds, however, fell one by one. Maratha morale seemed shaken. It appeared that Shivaji must fight desperately to sustain a drooping dream.

And Shivaji rose to the occasion. At one heroic stroke he smashed the prestige of the victorious army and made his name feared and honoured in Hindusthan. He pierced the Mughal's impregnable defensive rings almost without a fight and attacked and wounded the great Viceroy of the Deccan in his bedroom as he slept under the eyes of armed attendants.

The Mughal commander had encamped at Poona which he had captured. It was the month of *Ramzan*. Shivaji struck at night. In the hour of twilight he entered Poona with 4000 picked men who were ready to die at his bidding, and the party passed off as contingents of the imperial army. As the night deepened the Maratha chief crept to the back wall of Shaista Khan's residence. Working in silence, he and his men made a narrow breach in the wall. Shivaji was the first to crawl through, and was followed by his men. A labyrinth of canvas tents faced them. Shivaji hacked his way through, silencing the guards on his way, and presently he found himself in the harem, in the Khan's bedroom. Women screamed. The Nawab sprang to his feet. Shivaji dashed upon him with lifted sword. Suddenly the lamps went out. Shaista Khan fled under the cover of darkness, leaving behind a severed thumb.

Kettle-drums struck in the dead of night. The Marathas had ordered the Mughal bandsmen to play on their instruments. Screened by the tremendous confusion,

Shivaji vanished before the Mughals could recover from their surprise.

History seldom records a performance so daring and dramatic !

The success of Shivaji was attributed by friend and foe alike to possession of magical powers. He could make himself invisible ! The Nawab retreated to Ahmednagar, his nerves badly shaken. And he was soon sent away in disgrace to Bengal, a province which, as Aurangzib put it, was "a hell well stocked with bread."

A famous Rajput commander, Maharaja Jai Singh of Jaipur, was then commissioned with the task of Shivaji's subjugation. Shivaji made an earnest appeal to him, as one Hindu to another, to desist from the struggle. The poem-letter he sent on the occasion, a revealing document, has been published in the *Shivaji Souvenir* issued at Bombay in 1927 on the occasion of the great Maratha leader's Tercentenary Celebration, and extracts from it (translated into English by N. H. Pandia) would be of considerable interest.

I have heard that thou hast come to make battle upon me and to subjugate the Deccan.

Thou desirest .... to make thy face glow with blood drawn from the hearts and eyes of the Hindus.

But thou knowest not that thy face is painted in black, because owing to it, this country and religion are in danger.

Thou hast come to conquer at the instance of Aurangzib and under the instigation of those who desire to destroy the Hindus...

He (Aurangzib) desires that no strong persons should be left surviving among the Hindus in this world.

That lions may fight among themselves and get disabled, so that the fox may rule the forest.....

Is it meet that thou shouldest fight us and bring the heads of Hindus to death ?....

If thy cutting sword has true water, if thy prancing horse has true spirit, then do thou attack those who are the enemies of religion.....

Then do thou heat thy sword at the fire of distress of the land thou wast born in, and wipe off the tears of the unhappy ones who suffer from tyranny.

This is not the time for fighting between ourselves since a grave danger faces the Hindus.

Our children, our country, our wealth, our God, our temples and our holy worshippers are all in danger of existence.....

It is a matter of supreme wonder that a handful of Mussalmans should establish supremacy over this vast country.

He (Aurangzib) claps our own chains to our feet ; he cuts our heads with our own swords.

The most strenuous efforts should be made at this time to protect Hindus, Hindusthan and the Hindu religion.



## AN UN-MUGHAL MUGHAL

**H**E was long and lean and ashen pale as he lay stricken, his flowing white beard unbrushed, dishevelled. The bloodless lips were half-parted in silent prayer. He gave the impression of a very old vulture fading away not from sickness but from sheer age. But the impression was wrong. Even in sick-bed he had conducted with calm courage the highest business of State. And not much more than a year had gone by since the days of long weary marching and straining when he had flung a battering ram against the mountain fastness of Maharashtra Rajgarh. Once, twice, thrice, he had crushed the "hill rats." They had swarmed up again ! The rocks of Maharashtra housed a new-born Power. The old weary man of ninety had struggled to break that Power and was himself broken.

One March morning, 1707, Aurangzib, Emperor of Hindusthan, lay dying at Ahmednagar, holding a rosary in his hand. Five rubies and thirty pearls that rosary contained. But the shrivelled frame of the great one was not bejewelled. Two crores of rupees was the worth of stones that had usually adorned the holy person of a Mughal Shahan Shah. But Aurangzib, self-restrained, austere as an ascetic, calling himself a faquir of Allah (*Alamgir zinda pir* his flatterers called him) was flying away from an unadorned body of clay that was to be

relegated to no Taj Mahal but to a nondescript sandstone sepulchre under a narrow tomb-stone a few inches high, scented herbs growing in a built-in recess.

He had had premonitions of his end, and often in his lone moments he hummed the melancholy verse :

By the time you are eighty or ninety years of age  
You will have felt many hard blows from Fate;  
And when you reach the stage of a hundred years  
Life will be the very image of death.

Consider these extracts from his last will and testament, since they throw clear light on the inner man :

“Four rupees and two annas out of the price of caps which I have sewn are with the *mahaldar* Ali Begh. Spend this amount on the shroud of this helpless creature. Three hundred and five rupees in my purse are the wages I earned by copying the Quran. Give this amount to the faquirs when I die.

Bury this one, who wandered about in a valley away from the Right Path, with his head bare, for a sinner conducted in bare-headed humility before the Supreme Emperor (God) would evoke His mercy.

Cover my coffin top with a coarse white cloth. No canopy. No music.

Never trust your sons, never be intimate with them. Remember the saying : The word of a monarch is barren.

The strength of government rests on accumulation of authentic news. A moment's negligence may cause disaster. The escape of the wretch Shivaji was due to my carelessness; how hard I had to struggle against the Mah-ratta in consequence!”

History does not often record tragedies as poignant as that of Muhiddin Muhammad Aurangzib. The good and the evil in him were of immense proportion. He led

a simple, sinless un-Mughal life. He worked tirelessly, reading all petitions from his subjects, writing out orders with his own hand, and dictating even the smallest detail of orders to provincial governors and military chiefs. It is recorded that he slept no more than three hours in the night and day. He enforced strict discipline and was a past master of diplomacy. The threat of danger left him calm. Even as a youth of sixteen he had given a display of rare courage. In course of an elephant combat outside Agra Fort, an elephant, having routed his rival, charged madly at the Prince who was nearby on horseback. The young Mughal kept his mount under control, faced Subhakar—that was the tusker's name—and speared him on the forehead. The furious animal smote the horse with his tusk. Not a moment too soon Aurangzib sprang down from the saddle. Meanwhile the rival elephant returned to the attack and the Prince withdrew with quiet dignity. This extraordinary courage lasted all through his life, so that at times of stress when things around him trembled and toppled he himself kept his balance. Never did he quail, though faced by many a mad elephant during his half-century of reign.

And yet that man of courage possessed not a grain of qualities so essential in an emperor : generosity, mercy, sympathy, imagination. He made enemies all round. Everyone feared him. Many hated him. His suspicious nature withered him as it withered those he disfavoured. His unholy crusade against Hinduism was an act of supreme folly on which no real statesman in his senses could ever have ventured.

He had waded to the throne through pools of blood : murdered his brothers : deposed and dishonoured his aged father : tortured to death all whom he feared. He had imprisoned at one time or other all his five sons excepting

one. He had punished his eldest son Sultan, twenty years of age, by keeping him in prison till the prince died.

But the threads of human nature twist together with baffling complexity. And it is strange to recall that Aurangzib, coldly intellectual, apparently incapable of emotion, had in his thirty-fifth year (he had six children then) fallen madly in love! It happened five years before his accession to the throne, when he was Governor of the Deccan. One day he went to visit his maternal aunt, and was entertained in the garden with song and music. A pretty singer, Hira Bai, who was a concubine in the harem of Aurangzib's uncle, sent a sudden sharp flame in the heart of the Mughal Prince. It was infatuation at first sight! The *Masir-ul-Umara* tells the story :

“Hira Bai, on seeing a fruit-laden mango tree, in mirth and amorous play advanced, leaped up and plucked a fruit, without paying due respect to the Prince's presence. This move of hers robbed the Prince of his senses and self-control. With shameful importunity he procured her from his aunt's house and became infatuated and given up to her, in spite of all his severe continence and temperance and pure training in theology....One day she offered him a cup of wine and requested him to drink it. All his professions of reluctance and entreaty were disregarded. The poor Prince prepared at last to drink it, but that sly enchantress snatched away the cup from his hand and said: ‘My purpose was to test your love and not to embitter your mouth with this wicked and unlucky liquor!’” (*Sir Jadunath Sirkar's translation*).

Hira Bai died young. For once Aurangzib grieved deeply. Many others in the imperial household—sisters,

wives, daughters, sons, grandsons—died. Aurangzib lived on.

He lived on, a lone old man, hating and hated, witnessing the worms of decay eat away the foundations of the superb edifice which generations of Delhi Emperors had so fondly built. Like a lost wandering ghost he trekked along the rain-soaked roads of the Deccan, scaled mountains, crossed flooded rivers, always followed by a vast hungry army fatigued to breaking point, desperately engaged in a foolish long-drawn war. A faithful Kashmiri woman, Udaipuri, his youngest mistress and mother of his pet son Kam Baksh, kept him company. His daughter, Zinat-un-nissa, then an old maid, looked after the household. Peace was dead and buried in his hate-obsessed heart. He felt the approach of his end: saw visions of blood and ruin. His whole reign had been futile. There was a document under the pillow on which he laid his head in his last sleep, setting out a plan of partition of the empire among his three surviving sons. Would they abide by his will? Would he himself, a half-century before, have willingly shared his father Shah Jahan's Empire with Dara, Shuja and Murad, whose blood was to stain his hand?

His end was the end of a great epoch in India's annals. The Mughals had had their time. Grim forces were at work to force them out of the stage and clear the space for races from across the oceans. The last of the Great Mughals was not deaf to the roar of approaching demolition. "After me will come the deluge," was the melancholy comment of Louis XV at a time of imminent crisis. The Emperor of Hindusthan had, many years before the King of France, expressed the same sentiment almost word for word: "*As-ma-st hamah fasa-i-baqi!*"

## THE "FALSE GURU"

**O**UT of the flames of religious persecution the Sikh came forth, grim, heavy-bearded, wearing iron bangles. The word of Nanak had sprung to vivid growth. The Granth Saheb (Holy Book) had become a banner. The Sikh philosophy was designed to shape military minds. Life was struggle. Through death you reached deathlessness. Govind, the tenth Guru, had armoured his religion, that it could receive unbent, unbroken, the dread impact of Aurangzeb's bigoted blows. He had, in the words of a chronicler, "taught the sparrow to strike at the eagle."

One day, in the far south, an Afghan youth whom Govind had reared since infancy as a son of his own wounded him mortally with the treacherous blow of a dagger. After the Guru's death the question of succession had to be settled. Fast-speeding couriers were sent to the Punjab informing the chief disciples of Govind's death-bed injunction. He would transmigrate and appear in the body of one who outwardly resembled him: "Wherever the new leader would raise the banner of freedom the Sikhs must follow him for the salvation of their soul."

So it happened that an obscure Sikh named Banda (meaning slave), who had been the dead one's intimate friend, hurried from the Deccan to resume command at

headquarters. Spiritual leadership of the community was not conferred on him. It was entrusted to five venerable Sikhs. "Wherever five Sikhs of mine are assembled, they shall be priests of all priests," Govind had said. Banda, who was Govind's military successor, came to be known by the curious title of "False Guru." Though cruel, vengeful, destroying life and liberty with ruthless sweeps of his mighty arms, he was a true leader who inflamed the imagination of his followers and built out of them a great military machine that struck terror into the heart of the Empire.

Aurangzeb was dead. The tradition of intolerance and hate that he had built into the fabric of administration lived on. Sikh and Mughal were belligerents as before. But the Mughal could no longer work the wheels of persecution with relentless zeal. The Empire was in a state of confusion. The Rajputs had drifted apart from the Delhi throne. The Mahrattas had made their mountain fastnesses secure. The Mughal Empire was still vast as a colossus, but it was a jellyfish empire. Its outward symbols of pomp and magnificence were undimmed. Fine etiquette lay hanging in the Court chambers, like old embroidered velvet tapestry. Culture, however, was now an empty word. Art had fallen into decay—gone were the glories of Mughal painting (the great painters were often Hindus, working under unstinted Mughal patronage initiated by Akbar) and architecture. Even the great army, the very spine of imperialist power, was breaking apart, without discipline, without morale.

The make-up of circumstance, therefore, was in Banda's favour when he came speeding to the Punjab and raised forthwith the banner of Sikh independence. His success was quick, spectacular. Thousands crowded up at his call. Thousands were ready to die at his bidding.

Then Banda set out on his scorched earth campaign. Local commanders of Mughal troops (Faujdars) united and gave him battle. Banda, sweeping up like a storm, crushed them. He plundered town after town. He took hundreds of villages, ordered Mughal officials to die or clear away, and set up his own nominees as police, as revenue collectors. He advanced without respite, striking here, striking there, and his battles were marked by heavy losses on either side. "Many Mussalmans found martyrdom and many of the infidels went to the sink of perdition," writes Kafi Khan, the chronicler. Sometimes Banda made his appearance in places barely two days' march from Delhi—such was his reckless boldness.

And the great one, the Emperor on the Peacock Throne? The very name of Banda sent him into shivers of rage!

Banda lived in regal state, called himself "Sachcha Badshah" (True Emperor), and his followers were all "Lions." He struck coins in his name with this inscription : "Govind, King of Kings, made coins for two worlds; the sword of Nanak is the granter of desires, he is the true Lord." Not content with supreme authority in the State, Banda put forward a claim to be above grammar, and as an innovation he ordered all nouns in Hindi and Persian with feminine terminations to be changed into the masculine form!

Bahadur Shah, the Emperor, could do nothing to stop the revolt of the Sikhs. He died, and his successor with stern determination launched a campaign of reprisal.

Dressed in fakir clothing, heedless of death, the Sikhs terrified the Mughals by their valour. Yet, overwhelmed by superior forces, they had to fall back at last. After losing many battles they took refuge in the hill fastness of Lohgarh.



The Mughals besieged the fort. Days passed, and weeks, and the stored provisions, insufficient to meet the pressure, dwindled and almost ran out. What was to be done? The Sikhs had no fear for themselves, but they were anxious for the safety of their leader.

In this crisis a man of the Khetri tribe, a tobacco-seller by profession, came forward to give his life that Banda's might be saved. He dressed himself in the Guru's raiments and impersonated him. Meanwhile, Banda in disguise escaped through a secret passage. Reaching beyond the Mughal lines he made off to the hill territory of an ally, the "Burfi Raja," Icy King.

The fort of Lohgarh opened its gates to the besiegers who rushed in and found the Guru sitting in state, and great was their rejoicing as they took him prisoner. A courier galloped up the road to the capital to regale the Emperor with the happy news. The Emperor, overjoyed that his arch-enemy was at last in his power, gave the messenger rich rewards.

Then the truth was discovered. "The hawk had flown and an owl had been caught." Furious, the Mughal commander rushed to the home of the Icy King, seizing him. Blacksmiths were ordered to make an iron cage. In this cage were thrust the Icy King and the Sikh who had sacrificed himself for his leader. This cage was sent off to Delhi.

The Sikh religion forbade the shaving of hair and beard. The Emperor bent this prohibition to his own advantage, issuing a proclamation that all Hindus must shave off their beards. A good number of Sikhs had made a secret of their faith and, passing as Hindus, they served in public offices. How could they bow to the disgrace?

The Sikhs retaliated by destroying tombs and mosques. The war of religion continued and was marked

by deeds of violence on either side. However, the power of Banda wore out at last. His ranks thinned off. He was forced to seek refuge in the great fortress of Gurdaspur.

And history repeated itself. The Mughals could not take the fort by storm. But they besieged it, and such was their vigilance that not a blade of grass nor a grain of corn could find its way inside the fort walls. The provisions were exhausted. Hunger played havoc with the Sikh defenders. The brave warriors fighting for the liberty of worship were reduced to such straits that they ate horses, donkeys and even the forbidden meat of oxen. The suffering was hard to endure but no one spoke of submission. At last, however, pestilence broke the spirit worn thin by hunger. The situation was hopeless. The Sikhs surrendered.

The Mughals who entered the fort flung the starving thousands into prison and then started their bloody work. Nearly four thousand men were put to the sword by the Mughal commander who "filled that extensive plain with blood as if it was a dish." The severed heads were stuffed with hay and stuck upon spears. Those who escaped the sword were sent in chains and collars to the Emperor. A long procession crawled its way to Delhi—a thousand weary men marching on sore, bleeding feet, their chains rattling; grim-faced Mughal horsemen; and, preceding all, thousands of severed heads, eyes gaping, beards clotted with gore.

At the outskirts of Delhi a high Imperial official came up to greet the prisoners. He blackened their faces, put paper caps on their heads and mounted them on lame, worn-out, mangy asses and camels. Banda, too, had his face blackened, and he wore a woollen cap. All the men were in irons. And the vanguard was composed, as be-

fore, of the severed heads, rotting and stinking after the long journey, riding blood-stained spears!

The Emperor ordered that a hundred of the wretched prisoners be put to death every day in the bazar streets. "What is singular," says Ghulam Husain in his extremely interesting chronicle *Sier-ul-mutakhirin*, "these people not only behaved patiently during the execution but they contended for the honour of being first executed."

Another chronicler, Kafi Khan, has left a readable account of the Sikh revolt. When the executions were going on, the mother of one of the prisoners, having secured some influential support, pleaded for her son with great feeling before the Emperor. She represented that her son, an immature youth, had been taken captive by the Sikhs. His property was plundered and he was forced to enter the community, and now, for no fault of his own, he stood sentenced to death. Farrukh Siyar believed this woman, took mercy on her and pardoned her son. The eager mother arrived with the order of release just as the executioner stood with his blood-stained sword upheld over the youth's head. "Stop, in the name of the Emperor," she cried, panting, and handed him the imperial order. Her son stared at her, bewildered. The mother was speaking to the officer-in-charge, explaining. Then the blood of shame and anger flamed in the Sikh youth's face, and he lifted his voice: "My mother tells nothing but lies. I am heart and soul with my fellow-believers in our devotion to the Guru. Send me quickly after my companions, whom you have killed."

When Banda was in prison, a high official questioned him. "The marks of sense and intelligence are visible in your countenance. Why, then, have you committed such deeds of violence?" And Banda replied: "In all religions and sects, whenever disobedience among mortal men seems

to pass all bounds, the Great Avenger raises a stern one like me for the punishment of sin.

When He wishes to desolate the world,  
He places dominion in the hands of a tyrant."

The end of Banda was grim, as all his life. His little son was put in his arms and he was ordered to take its life. This he did, without a murmur, so that the little one, nestling in the comfort of its father's arms, could escape the torment to come. (The episode forms the theme of one of Rabindranath Tagore's poems). Then hangmen pounced upon him and tore off his flesh with red-hot pincers.

## MAHRATTA vs. ABYSSINIAN

**T**HE founding of an Abyssinian kingdom on the western coast of India, within a day's sail from Bombay, is to-day a forgotten episode. The tall dark Africans came in the fifteenth century, crossing the sea in their frail boats some decades before the Mughals stormed through the Khyber and won an empire at Panipat. Piracy was their profession. They swooped upon coastal villages, plundered ruthlessly, and seized men and women, putting them in chains; then they sailed away to the Arab seas to dispose of their victims in international slave markets.

Some of these pirates settled down in a rocky island called Janjira, about half a mile from the\*mainland. Crossing the dividing strip of water they extended their power over a tract stretching round the little town of Danda. It was the rents drawn from the peasants of the tract that maintained the haughty pirate-rulers. The fleet was the main weapon in hand. The dark-skinned sailors could launch an attack suddenly, terrorize the people, and vanish before there was time for an effective counter-attack. At first they owed allegiance, as a matter of convenience, to the Sultan of Ahmadnagar. But the chaos in the Deccan States on the eve of the Mughal invasion gave them their chance of independence.

Out of the seventeenth century decadence and confusion there emerged a Hindu warrior who could think

clearly, plan boldly, and act with precision. Son of a jagirdar, he made himself a king, He routed armies ten times stronger than his own; evolved a technique of guerilla warfare; challenged the Sultan of Bijapur; challenged the Mughal Empire itself, then shaken by Aurang-zib's communalism. Across the Ghats almost to the western seaboard his word was law. On hill and plain stretched the gay menace of *bhagyajhanda*, the banner of Mahratta ascendancy. A new nationalism was in the air. Shivaji was building a race of practical idealists. But the extent of his power was unexpectedly narrowed down on the sea-coast. Abyssinians barred the way.

The Hindu army, five thousand strong, defeated the Abyssinians in a furious land-battle, and captured fort after fort till all the mainland territory was recovered. But the island of Janjira held on. Cannon balls destructively aimed at its bare grey rocks created more smoke than damage. Shivaji could not reach his enemy. Nor could his enemy reach him. There was a strategic dead-lock.

The Situation was intolerable. Resenting the waste of time and energy and gunpowder, Shivaji, in the phrase of the courtier, Sabhasad, decided to "put the saddle on the ocean." A Hindu fleet of four hundred gun-boats (the number may have been less) appeared on the sea. The creator of the Mahratta guerilla bands rough-riding on sure-footed mountain ponies was also the creator of Mahratta sea-power.

Janjira was blockaded. Shivaji's plan was to starve it into surrender. The Abyssinian ruler, Fath Khan, lost heart and decided on submission. But three of his slaves would not let this happen.

The warriors of Janjira rushed into revolt and, led by the three slaves, deposed Fath Khan, imprisoned

him and some other seekers of peace, and placed power in the hands of their new leaders. The struggle with Shivaji was continued.

One night, in the spring of 1671, the Mahrattas were celebrating the *Holi* festival in the captured fortress of Danda standing by the sea. Drinks were being handed round. The short well-built soldiers laughingly smeared each other's forehead with blood-red *abir* powder. Suddenly on the landside there was a tumultuous outcry : "The enemy has attacked ! The *Habsbis* are here !" Jumping up, the men rushed to their arms and raced away in the direction. But it was only a ruse ! Some Abyssinians were on the landside, but their main body was hiding by the pier, awaiting their opportunity. Seeing the coast clear they started quickly to climb the sea-wall. Many fell down into the waves, but others held on, reached the top of the wall, and dashed into the fort without much resistance. Their chief raised his battle-cry : "Khassu ! Khassu !" The Mahratta garrison that had rushed in chase of phantoms returned, rather bewildered, when it was too late. They found the fort in the enemy's hands. Taken utterly by surprise, their *morale* was broken and they yielded ground and retreated without much struggle.

A greater enemy, the Mughal, kept Shivaji busy for the time. Aurangzib had sent an army for his extermination. Shivaji had to fight with his back to the wall. It was an unequal struggle. But as the war progressed the Mahratta leader gained more and more reputation. Dazzling feats came in steady succession, so that even the Mughal generals had to regard him as a miracle man, one who had supernatural powers. Yet all through the years of anti-Mughal combat Shivaji remembered the episode at Danda, his humiliating defeat at the hands of the Africans.

Thirty thousand Hindu soldiers gazed vengefully at the skyline that was Janjira, but in vain did they try to build a causeway connecting the isle with the mainland. Batteries thundered. The siege-troops achieved little. Floating platforms constructed on the sea were burnt by the Africans. They had carried away numbers of women. They had struck without mercy, in the manner of the worst Portuguese pirates. All Maharashtra expected Shivaji to chastise the evildoers with a staggering blow and obliterate the African menace.

But the great siege prepared by the Mahratta leader with so much determination had to be raised. The Abyssinians were surprising in their obstinate resistance against superior forces, and seemed to have a tremendous capacity for suffering privations. Each siege hit them hard, but none laid them low.

The story is one of episodes that repeated each other. Many times the Abyssinians lost their foothold and nearly crashed, but in a little while they were on their feet. They were reckless on the field of battle, unafraid of death, but their remarkable courage was blackened with wanton cruelty and savagery.

Often in face of superior forces they were reduced to extremely narrow straits. Often they craved for peace. But the only peace term that Shivaji would accept was evacuation of Janjira.

Death removed the Mahratta leader in the heat of the struggle, which went on under his son and successor. To possess himself of a place which his illustrious father had failed to conquer was Sambhaji's great passion. Seeing that force alone did not suffice, he took to other means. He directed one of his officers, Khundunji Fuzund, to desert to the Abyssinian chief and endeavour, by corrupting his men, to blow up the powder magazine dur-



ing the siege. But Khundunji Furzund was not a successful secret agent. A slave woman betrayed him, and the Mahratta was put to death.

The siege was continued by Sambhaji's General, Dadaji Raghunath. The defences of Janjira were battered down and a determined assault was made by means of boats, but owing to the slippery rock and the beating surf the Mahrattas could not keep their foothold. They were repulsed with heavy losses. When the beseiging army withdrew, the Abyssinians started again to make inroads into Mahratta territory.

Year after year the Mahrattas returned to the attack, but harried by the Mughal Imperial army they had to withdraw. The break-up of the Delhi empire at last brought humiliation on the little Abyssinian colony. Released from pressure on the northern front, the powerful Peshwas who thrust out to conquer the whole of Western India strove to pick out the thorn that had long stuck in their flesh, a thorn that was a source of continual irritation.

A third party however was now on the scene, the English East India Company. The Seedees (as the rulers of Janjira were called) sought their alliance. The English loved to hold the balance between rival powers.

The final chapter of the story opens with the accession of Seedee Yakut, who attained the eminence by the regent's will, though Abdul Rahim claimed to be the rightful heir. Abdul Rahim in despair appealed to force, and was deep in conspiracy with the Mahrattas. Yakut on the other hand secured help from the English. The pretender was repulsed. Then Yakut reasoned with himself : "If the Peshwa openly supports Abdul Rahim's cause, there will be trouble. Better make a compromise." So

he offered terms to his opponent : "Take Danda. And when I die you will rule over Janjira."

Civil war was averted. But Janjira had stood fatally in its shadow. And that shadow lingered. Abdul Rahim had a short rule. After his death his two sons disputed the succession. Then there was outside intervention, the Mahrattas and the English using the misfortunes of Janjira for their own political ends. But at last the triangular conflict found a solution. The Peshwa granted the two rival heirs a tract of land near Surat, and the English guaranteed the possession. The heirs in their turn relinquished all their rights over the little island.

Janjira was no longer the proud unconquerable island of past days ! Its glory had departed. Janjira had become a mere pawn in the diplomatic game. The Peshwa held the right and title for which Shivaji had struggled in vain. The last Abyssinian foothold in India was gone.

## THE TEREOR FROM PERSIA

**A** STRANGE procession trekked along the foot-hills of the Punjab in May, 1739: Persian soldiers marching, thousands and thousands; an elephant carrying the Peacock Throne; masses of precious stones and jewellery; wealth valued at fifty crores of rupees—accumulated by eight generations of Mughal Emperors. Along the upper courses of Punjab rivers the procession went, passing over dangerous, tottering bridges, one of which collapsed suddenly with a deafening roar, hurling two thousand men into the watery grave of the rain-swollen rapid!

On a giant elephant named Mahasundar rode Nadir Shah, the greatest commander in Asia at the time. Among all the invaders of Hindustan it can be said of him more than of any other that he came, he saw, he conquered. But he was no empire-builder, and his claim to our attention rests mainly on the rough, scarred, blood-stained hands that he holds up menacingly. His tiger-leap over India was an act of ferocity nearly equalled by that of the lame maniac Timur-i-lang.

There was not a drop of blue blood in his veins. His father Imam Quli was a poor Turkoman in Khorasan who made sheepskin coats and caps for his living. Nadir went through a hard time during his childhood. One day his village was raided by Uzbek brigands and he was carried

away to Tartary. For the space of four years he remained a prisoner. Returning home, he assembled some followers and became a brigand chief. This was the first step on the rough stairway leading to power and glory.

Circumstances, it has been aptly said, make a man. There perhaps would have been no Napoleon but for the heat and chaos of the French Revolution. Nadir Quli was a product of his times. Raw material was abundantly at hand with which to forge a sword. And Nadir Quli had the skill to forge it.

Under the Safawi dynasty Persia had become a great monarchy, prosperous, highly civilised. It had a succession of able kings. But after Abbas the Great came confusion. Weak, cruel, debauched monarchs disgraced the throne. The reputation of the monarchy still held, but it was a coloured bubble. The end came early in the eighteenth century. For a hundred years Southern Afghanistan had been a part of the Persian Empire. Now the Ghilzai and Abdali tribes rose in rebellion, seized Kandahar and established their independence. Then they pressed forward into the heart of Persia itself, tearing the Empire with the fury of enraged hawks. Ispahan, the capital, fell and the Shah gave up the throne. This was the beginning of Afghan rule over Persia.

But this alien rule did not last long. Smashed up, trampled underfoot by uncivilised tribesmen from barren hills, Persia at last awoke. There began an attempt to liberate the country from foreign domination. Suddenly on the stage there appeared a man who cried, "Thrust hard, brethren. Death is better than loss of independence."

The peasants flocked round his banner. For seven years the Afghans had tortured them horribly, so that

a million men had perished during that brief space. The brigand chief who came to their deliverance was a military genius. He defeated the Afghans, slaughtered a great many of them, and ascended the throne of Persia with the title of Shahan Shah Nadir Shah.

But the throne of Iran was not enough for him, and he set out on a career of conquest. From the Russians he acquired the seaboard provinces of the Caspian. From the Turks he wrested Armenia and Georgia, an island from the Arabs, hills from the Bakhtiari tribes. Then it was the turn of the Afghans. Eighty thousand Persian soldiers hurled their battering-rams on the walls of Kandahar. After a year-long siege the city was taken.

The Mughal Empire was in a bad way. The heritage of Babar and Akar lay dust-laden, crumpled up. Weak, pleasure-loving men on the Delhi throne were digging a formidable grave. The nobles were enervated, the soldiers inefficient. The inflow of fresh blood from across the Khyber had ceased. After Aurangzib there had been seven terrible wars of succession. The great Empire sprawled across Northern India, propped up by the memory of glory that had decayed and organization that had cracked—a carcass that still looked as though alive, but was secretly rotting away in all its entrails.

Nadir Shah saw his opportunity. Suddenly he pounced on the Mughal province of Kabul and conquered it. All Afghanistan was now under his rule. Having taken the gateways of India, Nadir Shah pressed forward across the mountain-barrier into Hindustan.

Great fortresses toppled down at his touch like houses of cards. Peshawar was taken by storm. Lahore submitted humbly. Wazirabad was reduced to black ashes. All along the trail of the invader property was plundered

and women raped. In a few weeks the fair province of the Punjab was a mass of ruin and misery.

Muhammad Shah, a descendant of the Great Mughals, was not gifted with foresight or intelligence. In his bewilderment he sent for the Nizam of Hyderabad, a grey-haired, experienced man who had served under Aurangzib. But his counsels came in clash with those of the "Hindusthan Party" at the Delhi Court. The spirit of faction and jealousy destroyed the possibilities of organizing a united front. While the Mughal nobles quarrelled with one another at this moment of supreme crisis, the Rajputs, hopelessly alienated by the foolish communalism of Aurangzib, stood apart and watched with cynical mockery the approach of the thunderstorm from Persia. The Mahrattas, on the other hand, made pretensions of friendship ("The Persian sovereign Tahmasp Quli has come to conquer the world. It is a glory to the Mahratta State to help the Emperor of Delhi at such a time," wrote Baji Rao the Peshwa in a letter), but did not raise a finger in aid of Muhammad Shah.

The invader encamped at Karnal with 160,000 men. There were also 6,000 Irani women, attired in crimson overcoats like the men, and undistinguishable from them at a distance. The encampment of Muhammad Shah who marched out to meet him was much vaster and comprised nearly a million souls. It was hampered by the Emperor's harem and the families of the great nobles. It lacked discipline and spread out like a jelly fish, moving with difficulty, containing more body than substance.

The story of Nadir Shah's victory need not be set out in detail—it was the victory of a military genius who knew how to manoeuvre boldly, to lure his enemies from entrenched positions and to strike a hammer blow at the right moment, at the right spot. The significant fact

was that what had been ere long the greatest empire in the world was now knocked down beyond recovery by an adventurer from Persia. Good-bye to Mughal glory! All Hindustan cracked up as though by a terrible earthquake shock. It is absorbing to visualise the forces that thus worked havoc: "Monarch of the universe and Emperor of Emperors, the Asylum of Islam whose throne is that of Alexander and whose court the heavens, the most noble and exalted sovereign Nadir Shah (may his kingdom endure for ever!)" pulls the Mughal Emperor to his knees, marches to Delhi and enters the city riding a grey charger. Troops line the road from the Shalimar garden to the great fort. The Mughal Emperor stands at the entrance, bowing in all humility. Nadir Shah walks on cloth of gold, and sits in resplendent array on the Peacock Throne (worth two crores of rupees). He sleeps and eats in what once was Shah Jahan's private suite. He asks Muhammad Shah to dinner and acts as host in the Mughal Emperor's house. He lectures him on his maladministration, and treats him as a school-boy. Muhammad Shah listens humbly. He is grateful that the conqueror from Persia has spared him his life. He swallows insults with infinite patience. He paints a smile over his pensive face.

The next morning (as Nadir Shah's secretary narrates the story) the Persian King graciously offers back the conquered throne to the fallen descendant of the Great Mughals. Muhammad Shah bows low in gratitude and lays before Nadir all his accumulated treasures and possessions. The gracious sovereign of Persia refuses the present, "though the piled-up wealth of all the other kings of the world did not amount to a tenth part of a tenth part of this immense hoard." At last he yields to the importunity of Muhammad Shah and appoints

trusty officers to take delivery of the money and other property.

So far all went well. But in the evening a rumour started in the bazars that Nadir Shah had been shot dead in the palace by a woman-guard. The rumour spread quickly. The people of Delhi believed it. "Time for vengeance!" they cried and hurled themselves upon Persians loitering on the streets. The riots lasted all through the night and well into the following morning. Nearly 3,000 Persians were slain.

Early in the night the news was brought to Nadir Shah. He ordered his soldiers to stand at their posts and not to counter-attack the rioters. But even at sunrise the rioting did not cease. Then the Persian King came galloping out of Diwan-i-Khas, clad in armour, surrounded by spearmen, and rode up to the Golden Mosque close by the Jewel Market. There, he faced his soldiers and unsheathed his sword. The naked blade of steel, aflash in the morning sun, was the signal for massacre.

The five hours of horror that followed are unsurpassed in their bestial ugliness in all history. Indiscriminate slaughter of men, women and children. Houses set on fire, property looted, maidens outraged. Many householders killed their own wives and daughters to save them from being raped by Persian soldiers, and then cut their own throats. Hundreds of women drowned themselves in wells. A large number, however, were carried away as captives. Significantly, this was the first day of the *holi* festival, and the streets were red not with *abir* powder but with blood. For days after the massacre corpses sprawled in houses and wells and on the streets, so that a sickening stench lay hanging like a foul blanket on the air of Delhi.



In utter humility the Mughal Emperor begged the Persian invader to pardon his foolish subjects. Nadir listened to the prayer and cried halt to the massacre. Such was the discipline of the Persian troops that they obeyed at once and stopped their blood-thirsty pastime. In the five hours of havoc 20,000 men had been slaughtered. Many escaped with their ears and noses cut. Thousands committed suicide. Every citizen of any means had to pay a huge ransom for his life and liberty.

Having done his destructive work Nadir Shah passed out of India, leaving no trace of his footfalls save in the mud of human misery. He did not like India, though his greed of gold was satisfied by the wealth in the vaults of Delhi and his sex hunger by the beauty of the Indian dancing-girl, Nur Bai. His acts of cruelty were repeated in other lands till he fell under the dagger of an assassin.

## PANIPAT, THE BEGINNING OF AN END

**V**ENGENCE"! shouted the citizens of Jaipur through clenched teeth. "Squeeze the necks of these Maratha rats." The whole city rose in fury and rushed towards the *Dakkin* camp.

It was the inevitable outcome of the third Peshwa's policy of aggression. Nadir Shah's terrific blow had smashed the Mughal Empire to pieces. Provinces had pulled apart. The Peshwa's army rode triumphantly through the chaos and wrested away Malwa and Bundelkhand. These acquisitions threw Maratha and Rajput into neighbourly contact. The new race looked menacingly at the old.

A war of succession in Jaipur gave the Peshwa an excuse for interference. The dispute ended, but the Marathas remained. Their encroachment became so strenuous, their arrogance so intolerable, that Maharana Ishwar Singh decided that death was better than humiliation. One day he and three of his queens swallowed fatal doses of poison.

Jaipur was stunned. There arose a loud cry of lamentation. Grief grew quickly into fury. The Marathas had brought on the tragedy. Down with them! The poison that destroyed the body of Ishwar Singh destroyed

also every possibility of alliance between the Maratha State and Rajasthan.

The third Peshwa's imperialistic drive swept onward to the gates of Delhi. The Mughal Emperor was nervously swinging between one war-party and another. Ahmed Shah Abdali, King of Kabul, had annexed the Punjab. Frightened by the loss, the Emperor decided to accept the Peshwa's offer of protection.

So the Peshwa became the real power behind the throne of Delhi. Ahmad Shah Abdali, who as Nadir Shah's successor claimed to be the rightful suzerain of Hindusthan, was stung to the quick. The Peshwa had flung an open challenge.

The Maratha army retired to the south to meet the menace of Nizam-ul-Mulk. Ahmad Shah seized the opportunity. He stormed his way to Delhi, "which was plundered (to quote a historian) and its unhappy people again subjected to pillage and its daughters to pollution."

The Peshwa was between two fires. He had enough enemies in the Deccan. Yet he chose to undertake heavy commitments in the north. An alliance with the Rajputs might have helped him to achieve his aim.

But that was not to be. It is a painful fact that all through the rolling tide of the centuries the Hindus remained divided among themselves. The Muslim example taught them nothing. Even when Ahmad Shah Abdali repeated his invasion of India with a great army and was joined by the powerful Rohilla chiefs as also by the Nawab of Oudh, the Hindus made no attempt at union.

The Peshwa was celebrating a victory over the Nizam when news came that Ahmed Shah had taken Delhi again, and was resolved to punish the Maratha with a devastating blow. Quickly he made the necessary preparations,

bringing together his veteran commanders, and organising an artillery unit under Ibrahim Khan Gardi, a soldier who had received his training under the French General, de Bussy. The army was placed under the nominal command of the Peshwa's son, Viswas Rao, the real head being Sadashiv Rao Bhao.

The Peshwa's army was in utter contrast to the clumsy, ill-clad troops of Shivaji who had lived on a handful of grain carried in a bag on the saddle, and thought nothing of sleeping under the sky. The new Maratha army had lofty, spacious tents lined with silk. Its officers dressed in cloth of gold. There were flags of all sorts, the finest horses magnificently caparisoned, a vast number of elephants. But the gain in splendour and dignity was achieved at the cost of swiftness, of mobility.

When the army was on the march, Surajmal, the chief of the Jats, offered some friendly advice to Sadashiv Rao Bhao. He said: "You are the master of Hindusthan. I am but a zemindar. Yet shall I give my advice according to the extent of my knowledge and comprehension. The families of the chiefs and soldiers, the large train of baggage, and the heavy artillery, will be great impediments to carrying on the kind of war which you have now in hand....It is therefore advisable to take the field unencumbered."

Malhar Rao and the other Maratha chiefs approved of this advice. They observed: "Trains of artillery are suitable to royal armies, but the Maratha mode of war is predatory. The best way is to follow the method to which we have been accustomed. The advice of Surajmal is excellent."

But Sadashiv Rao was drunk with power. He scoffed at the advice of "a mere zemindar." His harsh words were received in heated silence. And the indignant chiefs

said among themselves (according to Kasi Raja Pundit, a contemporary chronicler who was connected with the Maratha army): "It is better that this Brahmin should once meet with a defeat, or else what weight and consideration shall we be allowed?"

The opposing armies faced each other at a distance of "twice the range of a cannon ball" on the field of Panipat. Two great battles had been fought before on this historic field. The first had given Babar the Empire of Hindusthan. The second had enabled Akbar to win back that lost Empire.

Sadashiv Rao entrenched his troops by digging a long ditch fifty feet wide and "deeper than the height of an elephant." He had 55,000 horsemen, 15,000 foot, 200 pieces of cannon. The Afghan army likewise fortified itself behind felled trees. It consisted of 41,800 horse, 38,000 foot, besides irregulars who probably numbered as many more, and 70 pieces of cannon.

Thus entrenched, both sides started negotiations. Sadashiv Rao offered excellent terms. "The Bhao," writes the chronicler Saiyid Ghulam Ali, "notwithstanding his vast pomp, mighty valour and numerous associates, lost heart, and beholding the form of adversity in the mirror of his understanding, let slip the cord of firmness from his hand, and knocked at the door of humble solicitation."

But neither side was sincere in its desire for peace. The communications led to nothing. Skirmishes took place daily. Ahmad Shah evaded a decisive action. His tactics were bent on the destruction of the enemy's means of food supply, and in this he was so successful that the Maratha camp began to rage with hunger. It is not definitely known why Sadashiv Rao delayed the final battle. Probably he expected reinforcements.

Two months and a half passed away. The Marathas were starving. Discipline was gone. At last the chiefs and soldiers in a body surrounded the camp of Sahashiv Rao and cried : "It is now two days that we have not had anything to eat. Do not let us perish in this misery. Let us make one spirited effort against the enemy."

The Bhao approved of this, and distributed *pan* and betelnut as the signal for departure. All the grain was rationed out, so that the men might have one full meal that night. An hour before dawn, Bhagya Jhanda, the standard of the Maratha race, was on the march. With a terrific cry of Har Hari ! Har Hari Mahadeo ! the Maratha horsemen charged the enemy at the centre and smashed ruthlessly through a body of 10,000 horse.

So irresistible was the Maratha charge in the first hour of the battle that Ahmad Shah, fearing defeat, sent the ladies of his household on the way to the frontiers, mounted on "fleet steeds swift as the wind."

The troops on both sides fought with spears, swords, battle-axes and even daggers. At one moment great masses of Afghans, shrinking before the attack, began to fly away. "Our country is far off, my friends," cried their leader. "Whither do you fly?"

On the brink of defeat Ahmad Shah Abdali made his last desperate charge. Destiny came to his aid. A random shot killed Viswas Rao, son of the Peshwa. Moved by the sight of his dead nephew, Sadashiv Rao lost self-control, rushed recklessly into the thick of the battle and was seen no more.

Then, to quote Kasi Raja Pundit, "all at once, as if by enchantment, the whole Maratha army turned their backs and fled at full speed leaving the field of battle covered with heaps of dead. The instant they gave way the victors pursued them with the utmost fury; and, as

they gave no quarter, the slaughter is scarcely to be conceived." The great majority of the five hundred thousand souls in the Maratha camp were killed or taken prisoners. The women were kept as slaves. The men (nearly 40,000) were murdered in cold blood.

The Peshwa was crossing the Narmada with reinforcements when a *harkara* arrived with a letter. He opened it and read the message. "Two pearls have been dissolved, 27 gold mohurs have been lost, and of the silver and copper the total cannot be cast up."

So perished in the last battle of Panipat the bulk of the Maratha army with most of its veteran commanders. The immediate outcome of the battle was negligible. Ahmad Shah did not remain in India to enjoy the fruits of victory. Yet Panipat marked a turning-point in the affairs of Hindusthan. Two powerful antagonists, Maratha and Moslem, engaged in a ferocious struggle had weakened each other, and thereby cleared the way for the rise of a third power, the British. Four years after Panipat Clive obtained the Diwani of Bengal.

## A STATE IS BORN

**T**HE Emperor of Delhi was Jahandar Shah, grandson of Aurangzib. But the real ruler was Lal Kunwar, his mistress. Reputed to be a descendant of Tan Sen, the celebrated musician in Akbar's Court, she had been a mere singing girl. Her charms had cast a spell over the middle-aged Prince, and when he ascended the throne the favourite concubine was honoured with the title of Imtiyaz Mahal, Chosen of the Palace. Immense treasures were bestowed on her, along with an annual allowance of "two crores of rupees" for household expenses, exclusive of clothes and jewellery.

The ghost of the puritan Aurangzib, watching hollow-eyed, must have shivered in horror at the abandonment of decency and etiquette. Stark naked, the Emperor and his mistress bathed every Sunday in the tank at the shrine of the Chiragh-i-Dihli (Lamp of Delhi), in the belief that by this holy act they would be blessed with offspring ! Riding in a bullock carriage he visited the markets often with his mistress, against all decorum. The visits were enlivened with abundant drinks at houses of illrepute. One night on the way home the driver of the royal chariot (he too had shared the joy of intoxication) left the vehicle at the stable without inspection. The Emperor of Hindusthan lay asleep for hours in the stable ! Almost



every night the palace resounded with the drunken laughter of low musicians, friends of Lal Kunwar.

Strange were the freaks of Lal Kunwar's fancy. Three times a month Delhi was the scene of a vast illumination which burnt up the entire oil supply, so that clarified butter had to be used, until that too was no longer in the market. One day she gave an order that all the trees in Delhi and its suburbs be cut down. But the freaks of her fancy were sometimes much more than mischievous. One day, standing with Jahandar Shah on the roof of the palace, Lal Kunwar glimpsed a crowded ferryboat crossing the river. "I have never seen a boat-load of men go down," she said. That was a veiled hint. And, perched on the roof, the concubine was thrilled at the sight of a loaded boat being sunk by the palace guards, the wretched passengers struggling and going down in the water.

Rebuff came at last. The concubine's great favourite was Zuhara, once a vegetable-seller, now a woman of high rank. Zuhara was riding an elephant, followed by numerous attendants. Passing through a narrow street she noticed a palanquin ahead, with a small retinue. The palanquin was thrust rudely aside, and peering at its occupant, Zuhara cried out: "Is that the blind man's son?" Then the unexpected happened. The man in the palanquin gave an order, and his servants roughly dragged Zuhara from her elephant, an unthinkable insult, aimed, it was thought, not at Zuhara but at the great Lal Kunwar herself. Furious, the concubine complained tearfully to her Imperial lover, and he ordered the wazir to punish the offender. But the nobles at Delhi would not tolerate this. Jahandar Shah was alarmed and withdrew his order. For once Lal Kunwar was foiled.

This "blind man's son" was a Turani noble named Chain Qilich Khan. Later he received the title of Nizam-ul-mulk, Regulator of the State, and founded the independent kingdom of Hyderabad. The degradation to which Jahandar Shah dragged the Mughal Empire set the stage for Chain Qilich Khan's pre-eminence. When a woman like Lal Kunwar held the reins of supreme power, it was inevitable that men of ambition and courage should throw overboard their obligations to the crown and seek independence.

Chain Qilich Khan's family came originally from Samarkand. His grandfather Khwaja Abid, who had been a Qazi at Bukhara, received a high command from Aurangzib and died at the siege of Golconda. Chain Qilich Khan also started his military career under Aurangzib's government. In 1607 he was appointed Governor of Bijapur. There was a period of unemployment under Jahandar Shah, when he became the hero of the Zuhara incident noted above. Soon after he was won over to the cause of Farrukh-Siyer, a rival claimant to the throne. He benefited immensely by this treachery. The days of Jahandar Shah were now numbered. Farrukh-Siyer marched up at the head of an army. While a battle was under way, Lal Kunwar forced the Emperor to come into her *howda* and took him away to Agra. This signalled the end of Jahandar Shah's reign. The victor rushed to the capital and took him prisoner. The unhappy man begged that Lal Kunwar be sent to him, and on seeing her he cried joyfully: "Let the past be forgotten, and let us praise the Lord!" But Jahandar Shah had miscalculated if he had hoped that he would be allowed to live quietly in captivity. Soon after, Farrukh-Siyer marched into Delhi. At the back of his colourful procession was an elephant on which sat an

executioner carrying the severed head of Aurangzib's grandson on the point of a long bamboo stave!

Lal Kunwar was sent to Sohagpura (Hamlet of Love—a derisive name!), a settlement for the widows of the deceased Emperors. Here “in the practice of resignation they passed their lives, receiving rations and a monthly allowance.”

Chain Qilich Khan had backed a winner, and was rewarded handsomely. He was given the title of Nizam-ul-mulk Bahadur Fathe Jang, and made Governor of the Deccan. Thus it was that the ruling family in Hyderabad today derived its title.

But Farrukh-Siyer was as weak a ruler as his predecessors. He was, as a historian remarks, “for ever letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would.’” He would not have made his final bid for the throne but for the incitement of his mother. Nor would he have gained his object but for the armed assistance of the two Sayyid brothers, Abdulla Khan and Hussain Ali, members of a warlike clan famous for generations. Farrukh-Siyer sat on the throne, but the two brothers ruled. Chafing at his dependence, the Emperor plotted their downfall.

Nizam-ul-mulk was an interested party in this overheated atmosphere of jealousy and intrigue. Opportunist that he was, he gave his support first to the Emperor, then to the Sayyid brothers. There came a moment when the Emperor was deserted by all his friends. The struggle had reached its peak. Hussain Ali had come marching from the Deccan with 30,000 horsemen, and the Peshwa to assist him. The palace was surrounded.

Farrukh-Siyer raved at his wazier. “If I am a true son of Azim-ush-shan and a real descendant of the Lord of the Conjunctions (i.e. Timur), I will impose retribution for these uncalled-for deeds and this unmeasured

audacity. I will have the lands of the Barha ploughed by asses, and mice thrust into the trousers of their women." Abdulla Khan listened, and remembered the words of Sadi: "When a snake touches the foot of the villager he withdraws it and breaks the snake's head with a stone." The wazier had gone too far to cry halt to further action.

Farrukh-Siyer in anger and fear left the audience chamber and took refuge in the harem. Armed Abyssinian women were posted to guard the doors. Queens and concubines crowded round and passed the night "in supplication and lamentation before the throne of the Eternal." Sayyid's men stood on every roof with loaded muskets. In vain did Farrukh-Siyer contemplate escape. "Such close guarding was carried out," writes the Muslim chronicler, "that not even the gentle breeze could find its way into or out of the fort."

In this extremity a number of nobles rallied round the Emperor. It was confidently expected that Nizam-ul-mulk would join their company. But the Nizam kept out of their way. Prudent as ever, he stayed at home, awaiting the turn of events.

Hidden in a closet, Farukh-Siyer swore vehemently. By the blood of Timur the world-conqueror which flowed in his veins, he would punish the rebels, scourge them so that for years to come their tale would be on the people's tongue. Outside on the streets his partisans were giving up resistance in despair: "to beat cold iron is profitless!" Then the drums sounded in the palace, announcing a new reign. A grandson of Aurangzib had been chosen to fill the throne, but he had concealed himself in a store-cupboard and could not be found. However, one prince was as good as another. A substitute was picked out and seated on the throne, and the Sayyid brothers earned the nickname of kingmakers.

Then a band of Afghans came to the harem to arrest the deposed Emperor. The women guards fought valiantly, but in vain. The wretched Emperor was dragged away, barefoot, blows showering on him. He was thrown down and blinded with a needle with which Abdulla Khan used to apply *shurma* to his eyes.

Thrust in a bare dark hole, he amused himself by composing verses::

A heart is mad with wine, give it wine,  
It is consumed with fire, give it fire.  
To him who asks the state of my heart,  
Breathe but a sigh, give that as answer.  
To the new Emperor he sent a note of warning:  
Be not taken by the gardener's deceit, O  
    nightingale,  
Ere this I, too, had my nest in this garden.

He was severely tortured in the cell. Bad food brought on diarrhoea. He was deprived of water for ablution, and had to cleanse himself with pieces torn off his garment. In this polluted condition he lost the single pleasure left him, that of reciting the Koran. Such recitation was unlawful when one was polluted. Death by strangling came as a relief from misery.

Nizam-ul-mulk went back to the Deccan. Anxiously he looked into the future and saw signals of danger. How long would he be trusted? He began to assemble troops. When the order came from Delhi transferring him to another Province, Nizam-ul-mulk raised the banner of revolt.

So arose an independent dynasty in the Deccan. The Sayyid brothers came down in person to punish the Nizam and prevent the break-up of the Mughal Empire. The war lasted some months. Hussain Ali was killed. His

brother Abdulla Khan was made prisoner. Nizam-ul-mulk, victorious, came to Delhi as wazier. Abdulla Khan died in prison, and the chronicler comments : "God forbid that his (the Emperor's) counsel should have been given for poison, but God only knows !"

Nizam-ul-mulk did not stay long at Delhi. Better to enjoy independence as Nawab of the Deccan than to serve a wilful ruler whose Empire was crumbling to pieces. Back in his kingdom, he had to wage continual war with the rising power of the Marathas. His historic role was indeed to act as buffer between Maharashtra and the growing British settlements.

Nizam-ul-mulk, the founder of a dynasty, did not make his path of ambition a path of crime. His story is that of a man who knew how to stand and wait. Prudent, cautious, restrained, he was wise enough to see an opportunity, and bold enough to seize it when it came his way.

## MADHOJI SINDHIA: SOLDIER AND STATESMAN

**T**HE mare was doing her best. Slim, built for speed, she galloped hard, wide-nostrilled. Her rider, bending double, spurred her on mercilessly. He could, on his bony up-country mount, almost feel the breath of the pursuing Afghan horsemen. The chase had continued for miles. The rider flying for his life thought it had lasted for ages. "Will it never end, O God!" he groaned.

His name was Madhava Sindhia. He had escaped from the terrible carnage of the third Battle of Panipat where the backbone of Maratha power lay broken. The Afghans were fiendish with blood-lust. They had butchered forty thousand prisoners on that fatal afternoon, and were yet unsated.

The panting mare gathered all her strength and darted like an arrow. The distance lengthened between pursued and pursuer. Then the end came. The mare leapt to clear a ditch. She slipped and fell. No hope of escape! Madhava Sindhia waited for the inevitable doom.

Up raced the Afghan soldier and jumped from his horse. "Infidel!" he grimaced, and spat in the fallen man's face. He struck Sindhia on the knee, crippling him for life, stripped him of his rich garments and jewels, and rode away.

Madhava Sindhia lay in the ditch until evening, when a Muslim water-carrier driving his bullock home caught sight of the Maratha chief. "Help me, oh brother," the wounded man cried groaning. Rana Khan lifted him on his bullock and took him to a place of safety. Sindhia never forgot this act of kindness. He called the water-carrier his brother and rewarded him generously. Later in life when he rose to be the ruler of Hindusthan he made the Muslim a commander in his army.

Madhava was the illegitimate son of a slipper-bearer. His father, Ranoji, had taken service under the Peshwa in that humble capacity, but rose to be a jagirdar in Malwa. He established his headquarters at Ujjain, the capital of the legendary Vikramaditya, and managed his fief well. He died, leaving five sons. They all, except the illegitimate Madhava, were killed in action. The last survivor of the family, Madhava succeeded to his father's property and titles, after overriding the obstacles inherent in illegitimacy.

He was now thirty years of age, energetic, ambitious, gifted with imagination. He had seen the dashing of Maratha dreams, and the uprush of the spirit of defeatism. Overnight, the mighty race of Maharashtra had become the ghost of its former self. The Shivaji tradition was only a far memory. The political sky of Upper India was smoky with chaotic, conflicting purposes. Delhi was a vacuum that drew all, but it retained none. Ahmad Shah Abdali had not lingered to enjoy the fruits of his conquest. The cry was for a man of action, who could race his mind over the hurdles of petty gains and think sweepingly in terms of Empire.

Madhava Sindhia was the man of the hour. He had a clear, well-sketched plan, and possessed the tenacity to pursue it to the end. He had the power to fire the minds



of his followers and give a direction to their thoughts. True, circumstances made him. But, then, he also made the circumstances. His genius winged in two distinct realms of achievement: he was as great a statesman as a soldier. All his life he fought with one hand against the attacks of lesser men who lacked his vision, and the other he employed in remaking the broken prosperity of his people.

At Panipat Maharashtra had been drained of its man-power. But the hardy, virile race was quick to produce a new generation, replacing the old. Only eight years after Panipat a new Maratha cavalry appeared under the command of Madhava Sindhia and Tukoji Holkar. All roads in those days led to Delhi. The Emperor Shah Alam was a refugee under British protection, and the capital was in the hands of the Rohilla deputies of Ahmad Shah Abdali. In 1771 the Maratha banner flew triumphantly over the palace of the Great Mughals. Then the Marathas negotiated with Shah Alam for his return to Delhi. It would suit their purpose to have a puppet on the throne, vested with the appearance of power, while they themselves possessed the reality.

Shah Alam was then residing at Allahabad. The chains of restraint were tight round his limbs. So degraded was he that he had to stop the palace band at the order of the British commandant who disliked the "barbaric" music. (Centuries before, Bernier had found in those strains "something majestic.") The fallen Mughal dreamed of a restoration. The Maratha proposals seemed heaven-sent. Against the advice of the British Government Shah Alam set out for Delhi. Sindhia came out some way to take him under protection and escorted him to the capital.

Then a quarrel broke out between the Marathas and the British, and developed into war. The war resolved itself into a duel between Sindhia and Warren Hastings. For twelve months the two ablest contemporaries in India faced each other with battle in their eyes. But this time Sindhia had to yield. The decisive blow was struck by Hastings on Sindhia's fort at Gwalior.

The fort stood on an isolated rock, precipitous, stretching for a mile and a half, and rising to a height of 342 feet. Sindhia, riding on the rapid wave of his expansionist policy, had wrested it from the Jats who had held it since the dismemberment of the Mughal Empire. British tactics was to stir up a hostile front of Jats and Rajputs in Sindhia's rear, keeping him engaged.

Popham, the British officer in charge of the undertaking, had careful instructions from Hastings. He crossed the Chambal and marched rapidly to Gwalior. He confided his plan to none but Captain Bruce, his military engineer, whom he sent ahead with a storming party. Scaling ladders had been prepared in strict secrecy. On a dark night twenty British soldiers wearing cotton pads to muffle the sound of their footfall advanced, unobserved, to the rock. They were guided by some of the thieves who knew the place well ! " Hush !" went a stifled whisper as lights and voices were coming in their direction. They lay still, a party of dumb ghosts, while the Maratha guards strode away on the walls above on their usual round. Then the Britishers propped their ladders against the rock, climbed soundlessly, surprised the guards and overpowered them.

Swift on the heels of the storming party came Popham with his red-coated troops. The great fort, thought to be impregnable, was captured without the loss of a single soldier !

Sindhia's practical mind was quick to grasp the new political realities. The foreigners had consolidated themselves in Bengal. There was a time when the Marathas had extorted *chauth* (one-fourth of the revenue) from the Nawab of Bengal, and the panic-stricken merchants of Calcutta had started defence works for the town in the shape of a great ditch. Then had come the nightmare of Panipat. In 1760 the Marathas could have ousted the handful of foreigners. Now it was too late. The Maratha chiefs lacked union. They viewed each other with jealousy. Madhava Sindhia, knowing the limits of his own strength, concluded that he would do well to avoid British hostility. Let the foreigners thrive in Bengal. His own ambition soared over the carcass of the Delhi Empire. His great scheme was to make himself paramount in Upper India.

Warren Hastings, too, possessed an equally practical mind. His imperialism was not of the rash, hazardous type. He hated to build on weak foundations. He had much respect for Sindhia's character and valued his friendship and responded handsomely by restoring to him his former possession. The new understanding amounted to an agreement to partition the Indian peninsula between Hastings and Sindhia. The Maratha Chief had at last a free hand to take what he chose in the North.

Some two years later, when standing at the bar of the House of Commons, Hastings said in defence of his relations with Sindhia: "I declare that I entered into no negotiations with Maharaja Sindhia for delivering the Mogul into the hands of the Marathas: but I must have been indeed a mad man if I had involved the Company in a war with the Marathas because the Mogul, as his last resource, had thrown himself under the protection of Sindhia."

An announcement in the *Calcutta Gazette* said: "We

learn that Sindhia is going on a hunting party." But the Maratha chief was not out to hunt tigers. He had a bigger game in view. Onward he marched to the gates of Delhi, offered the Emperor his services. He obtained two patents—one appointing the Peshwa to be Vice-regent of the Empire, and the other placing himself in command of the army as the Peshwa's agent. As a guarantee for the payment of troops the revenue of Delhi and Agra was assigned to the Maratha Chief.

An imbecile puppet sat on a poor imitation of the Peacock Throne. Sindhia was the real ruler of the Mughal Empire. He was supreme in Hindusthan. The rebellious Muslim Chiefs offered submission for the moment. Maratha troops kept guard over the Red Castle of Shah Alam. Sindhia's next step was to organise a standing army trained by European officers.

But the moment of security passed. The price of glory had now to be paid, such as the great Mughals had paid. India had been in a chronic state of rebellion. Sindhia found himself suddenly menaced by a formidable combination of Mughals and Rajputs.

The cards turned, Sindhia fell as quickly as he had risen. The Emperor was a mere pawn in the military game. Soon after, Ghulam Kadir sacked Delhi, committing the most terrible atrocities in history. In this crisis Sindhia rose to the height of his power. He collected reinforcements and defeated his enemies. And he sent the mangled trunk of the fiendish Ghulam to be presented to the blinded Shah Alam.

The Emperor called him his son and decorated him with the title of "Exalted and Illustrious Centre of Affairs." But his meteoric rise was viewed with jealousy by men of his own race. The Peshwa was not sympathetic, the Holkar was openly hostile, while all orthodox Hin-

dus resented his adoption of the European technique of warfare. Sindhia could not afford to be cut off from his homeland. With cool calculation he made his plans.

He proceeded to Poona with a small escort and waited upon the Peshwa in Darbar. He walked the State enclosure on foot, unattended. At the darbar he took a seat below all the other officials. When the Peshwa arrived, he rose, made humble obeisance, and out of a bundle he carried, he unwrapped a new pair of slippers. "This," he said, "was my father's occupation, and it must also be mine." He advanced, removed the slippers the Peshwa was wearing, and put the new pair before him. Then he took a seat at the Peshwa's gracious request, the Chief's old shoes held humbly in his hands. Next day he arranged an impressive ceremonial and invested the Peshwa with the office of Vice-regent of the Empire with its insignia of the Silver Fish.

"Madhoji made himself a sovereign by calling himself a servant," remarked an observer. By holding the Peshwa's slippers to his bosom he had fired the imagination of the Maratha race. This man was no self-seeker, thought the masses. He was the most powerful man in Hindusthan, and yet he called himself a servant of the symbolical head of the Maratha confederacy !

Entrenched in the Peshwa's favour, he flung the battalion of De Boigne (the best part of his army) against Holkar and vanquished him. It is said that his next plan was to oust the British from India. "The great dream of Madhoji Sindhia's life," writes Colonel Malleson, "was to unite all the native powers of India in one great confederacy against the English... In this respect he was the most far-sighted statesman that India has produced... It was a grand idea, capable of realisation by Madhoji, but by him alone, and which, but for his death, would have been realised."

## THE BLACK HOLE: FACT OR FICTION

SIRAJ-UD-DAULA burst into uncontrollable fury. "Go!" his voice hissed to the cowering messengers. Fiercely he paced the room, as he watched them withdraw in fear and humility. "Those vile traders, those sons of pigs!"

In a while he cooled off, sat on a divan and gulped down a glass of sparkling Persian wine. He was wearing a white, flowing robe, close-fitting to the arms, and a coloured girdle of twisted silk; three rows of pearls on his chest; a turban shaped like a skull-cap and set with gems.

He was well-built, rather thick-set, and had a round face, decked with a little moustache but beardless, and large, expressive heavy-browed eyes that flashed readily with savage anger. He loved splendour and women. It is said that he was perverse in his tastes, that his character was strongly tinged with sadism. He thrilled (according to some accounts) at the sight of bodies in torment, and this abnormality went so far that he had the bellies of women with child opened before him that he could witness their agony and the live human embryo. Tradition invests him with unsurpassed licentiousness. No woman of beauty, whatever her rank, was safe from him. His spies moved darkly among the people, their

eyes hunting for loveliness. Even the great multi-millionaire Jagat Seth was in constant dread of losing the honour of his family, for any day the Nawab might cast a covetous eye on the maidens in his house. He could never forget how the man had insulted him one day, and threatened with a vulgar leer that he would presently have him circumcised!

It is hard to tell definitely whether Siraj-ud-Daula was really such a bold bad man as he has been painted. Few characters in history have been so ruthlessly blackened. The English accounts have thrown mud on him out of prejudice and enmity. A Muslim chronicler, writing in an excellent style, splashed Siraj-ud-Daula with ill-repute, but it seems that the man had a grudge against him. The bulk of evidence reveals him in an ugly light. Yet one wonders if the twenty-four-year-old Nawab should not be given some benefit of doubt.

His maternal grandfather, Ali Vardi Khan, a military adventurer, wrested the province of Bengal, Behar and Orissa from the feeble hands of the Emperor. It was his policy never to encourage the white traders who built factories over the face of Bengal and drained away the wealth of the country across the ocean. In his death-bed speech to his youthful successors Siraj-ud-Daula, the eighty-year-old Nawab said: "Keep in view the power the European nations have in the country. From this fear I would have freed you if God had lengthened my days. The work, my son, must now be yours. Their wars and politics in the Telinga country should keep you awake. The power of the English is great. They have lately vanquished Angria and occupied his country. Reduce them first. Suffer them not, my son, to have fortifications or soldiers."

The English began to offend the new ruler from the

moment of his rise to power. They insulted him by omitting to send him gifts on his accession. They gave shelter to a merchant named Krishna Das who had incurred the Nawab's displeasure. "I have three substantial motives for extirpating the English out of my country," Siraj-ud-Daula summed up the situation in a letter. "One, that they have built strong fortifications and dug a large ditch in the King's dominions, contrary to the established laws of the country; the second is that they have abused the privilege of *dustucks* by granting them to such as were in no wise entitled to them, from which practice the King has suffered greatly in the revenue of his customs. A third move is that they give protection to such of the King's subjects as have....made themselves liable to be called to account."

Four days later he began his march on Calcutta. It was the hottest part of the year. The country was without roads. A cumbrous train of artillery, drawn by elephants and bullocks, trampled across the paddy-fields. Strange as it was, the debauched ruler of Bengal marching along this difficult route covered 160 miles in eleven days. A little delay would have been fatal: the heavy downpour due to burst in a week would have rendered his musketry, which were all match-locks, almost useless.

Calcutta was attacked on June 18, 1756. The fort was a brick building, quite inadequate for defence. The English decided to make a stand in the adjoining part of the town. They placed batteries across the principal streets and closed the smaller entrances with barricades. These quickly yielded before superior force and the English retreated into the fort. That building was by this time crowded with women and children, who set up an awful uproar and confusion. Cannon-balls came flying



in and crashed against the walls. To protect themselves from musketry the English piled up packages of linen on the ramparts, and to deaden the impact of the cannon-balls they placed bales of cotton against the walls.

The besieged held on for two days. Then they began to lose heart: on the second night the women and children were sent away to ships lying at anchor in the Ganges. Drake, the Governor of Calcutta, escorted the helpless ones to the boats. In a moment of cowardice he got into a boat and did not return. Two members of Council had already acted in the same way, and the Commander of the fort thought it prudent to follow their example.

"Cowards!" every soldier in the fort hissed. Fear seized the men. The Nawab's troops were letting loose a hail of bullets from surrounding houses, and the surrender of the fort was only a question of hours. Signals were raised, beseeching the ships to return. There were seven or eight of them but not one returned.

So the fort surrendered. It was, in the words of Holwell, a member of the Calcutta Council, "as fatal and melancholy a catastrophe as ever the annals of any people suffered since the days of Adam." It was Sunday, the 20th June. Siraj-ud-Daula entered the fort. The English soldiers were captured, but not ill-treated.

The question was how the prisoners might be secured for the night. A search was made for a suitable apartment, but none was found. Then someone mentioned the "Black Hole," a small ill-ventilated room used by the English as a prison. Without further inquiry the prisoners, 146 of them, were crowded at the point of the sabre into this room, only 18 feet square.

Every schoolboy has read lurid accounts of the horror of the Black Hole: the terrible suffering of the prisoners, the madness that drove them to trample on each other

and fight for water, the insults they poured on the sentries to goad them into opening fire and ending their misery, and the brutality of these sentries who enjoyed the *tamasha*. Holwell has told all this in gruesome detail in his narrative, "than which, (to quote a historian) nothing more pathetic is to be found in the annals of the British in India." The torture lasted from seven o'clock in the evening to six in the morning, when of 146 men only 23 came out alive.

But was there really a Black Hole horror? Or was it a fabrication? Strange falsehoods creep sometimes into history and grow hardened, defying the disapproval of research. It is just possible that the event never took place. It is probable that its horrors have been fantastically exaggerated.

It is significant that the contemporary Muslim chronicler Gulam Husain does not mention the incident in his extremely readable book *Sier Mutakharin* (Review of Modern Times); nor do the other chroniclers mention it. Nor is it mentioned in the proceedings book of the English who had fled from Calcutta and sailed away to Fulta. Nor in the reports of the debates of the Madras Council. Nor in Clive's letters to the Nawab, and to the Court of Directors in England. Nor in the Treaty of Ali Nagar. Damages of every kind were later demanded from Mir Jafar, but none for the relatives of those alleged to have perished in the Black Hole.

The world came to know of the incident from the account written by Holwell, who had been a prisoner that fatal night and had survived. But Holwell was, on clear evidence, an incorrigible liar. Famous English historians of today agree on this point. His contemporaries wrote of Holwell's addiction to falsehoods. But a man may be a liar, and yet he could for a change tell the truth!

Did Holwell, sailing homeward on board the *Syren*, and employing his ample leisure to write the story of the Black Hole, tell the truth or invent a hoax?

Then, again, it seems impossible, physically, that 146 persons were squeezed into 367 square feet of space. "Geometry contradicting arithmetic gives the lie to the story. It is little better than a bogey against which was raised an uproar of pity."

Even if the incident actually happened, Siraj-ud-Daula cannot be blamed for it. Historians agree that he had been kind to the prisoners when the Fort of Calcutta was taken. He had assured safety to Holwell and his companions on the faith of a soldier. The prisoners had been carelessly lodged in the Black Hole by the Nawab's officers to whom attaches all the weight of the blame.

Whether fact or fiction, the Black Hole marked the beginning of the end for Siraj-ud-Daula. He was a plaything of circumstances over which he had no control. The English cloaked themselves in secrecy and fought the enemy with underhand means. Their main weapon was conspiracy. Clive himself was an arch-conspirator. A stronger and more intelligent man than Siraj-ud-Daula might have torn through the spider-web. But the last independent Nawab of Bengal knew nothing of tact or diplomacy. So, exactly a year after the Black Hole, he stood with a large army facing the red-coated troops of Colonel Clive. The bulk of Siraj-ud-Daula's army had been bought over with promises. Mir Jafar, the Commander-in-Chief, had sold his honour for the throne of Bengal. When Clive attacked, he stood neutral with the bulk of the troops. In a camp rotten with corruption and treachery there was one faithful general, Mir Madan. He was the real hero of Plassey. But fate smiled upon Clive,

and Mir Madan, dashing ahead to storm the English position, was hit by a cannon-ball.

Siraj-ud-Daula fled on the back of an elephant. Reaching the capital he tried to raise a new army but failed. In despair he put his family in a boat and sailed away. The chronicler of *Sier Mutakharin* describes his capture: "This unfortunate Prince, already overtaken by the claws of destiny, arrived at the shore was Rajmahal where he landed with the intention to prepare some *kichri* for himself, and his wife, his daughter, none of whom had tasted food for three days and nights. It happened that a Fakir resided in that neighbourhood. This man, whom probably he had oppressed in the days of his full power, rejoiced at this fair opportunity of enjoying revenge. He expressed pleasure at his arrival; and taking a busy part in preparing some victuals for him, he meanwhile sent an express over the water to give information to the Prince's enemies....

Be this my advice to thee, if thou wilt but hear me,

If thou hast planted thorns, thou canst not expect to reap jonquils."

The unhappy Prince begged that his life be spared, and he be allowed a pension and a corner of land where he could live forgotten. Mir Jafar, now Nawab of Bengal, put him in charge of his son Miran. This Miran stands out as one of the most despicable characters in Indian history. "Quick-minded in committing murders," boasting of his cruel deeds, he, curiously enough, dressed and spoke like a woman! At night he sent a man to murder the deposed prince.

Meanwhile, Mir Jafar had taken his usual dose of bhang and was sleeping heavily. When he woke up he sent a message to his son, Miran, advising him to keep

a watchful eye on Siraj-ud-Daula. Miran laughed at the message and sent back answer that he was not the man to neglect such an important charge. And turning to his companions he tauntingly remarked: "Pray, gentlemen, is not my father a curious man with his message? As a son of Ali Vardi Khan's sister, how could I prove dilatory in so important a matter?"

## A "JUDICIAL MURDER"

**I** KNOW what belongs to the dignity of the first member of this Administration. I will not sit at this Board in the character of a criminal, nor do I acknowledge the members of the Board to be my judges....The chief of this Administration, your superior, gentlemen, appointed by the Legislature itself, shall I sit at this Board to be arraigned in the presence of a wretch whom you all know to be one of the basest of mankind? I believe I need not mention his name, but it is Nuncoomar! Shall I sit to hear men, collected from the dregs of the people, give evidence at his dictating against my character and conduct?"

Warren Hastings spoke with an air of wounded innocence. Philip Francis, a member of the Supreme Council, had sprung a surprise. He had informed the Council that Maharaja Nanda Kumar had visited him and handed over a sealed letter with a request to submit it to the Board. He had added that he had no precise knowledge of what the letter contained. It was opened and read, and was found to carry charges of corrupt practices against the Governor-General. The main accusation was the acceptance of bribes amounting to three and a half lakhs of rupees.

The scenes of the strange drama that soon started must be set against the contemporary political background.

The Regulating Act had made Hastings the executive head in India, but he was to abide by the decisions of a Council of Four who would act as a check and balance. A majority would decide the course of every political issue. But three of the Members, Francis, Clavering and Monson, were leagued against their chief. They were determined, in their campaign of hatred, to hamper Hastings at every step. They outvoted him on questions of far-reaching policy and forced him to act against all his avowed principles. They made him a mere figurehead. "A timid, desperate, distracted being...weary of life," as Francis contemptuously said.

But the Majority (so the three Councillors were called) aimed not simply at investing the Governor-General with ridicule and taking the reins of power in their own hands. They sought to hound the hated creature out of India. Hastings had as many enemies at home as friends. Clive disliked him and remarked that "he had never heard of Hastings having any abilities except for seducing his friends' wives." (He had purchased a German lady, Countess Imhoff, from her husband for £10,000 and married her after the divorce. He was so completely under her influence that job-hunters had little chance unless they cultivated her favour). But he had the confidence of the Court of Directors. The passage from a petty clerkship to the highest post in the administration, carrying a salary £25,000 a year, had been one of wide knowledge and experience—and this the Directors never forgot. No other servant of the Company was such an expert in Indian affairs and had such grasp over detail. He knew Bengali, Urdu and Persian. He understood politics and commerce. He was the one man who could build a system of government out of the "confused heap of undigested materials as wild as the Chaos itself." All

this the Directors knew. Francis and his colleagues realised that they might heap mud upon Hastings, and yet they could not stain his fine reputation. Mere allegations were futile. Evidence must be produced that Hastings was corrupt, that he was cheating the Honourable Company of its rightful dues. Then Maharajah Nanda Kumar (the title had been bestowed by a Delhi Emperor) appeared, and became a spear in their hands. He had his own private quarrel with Hastings, who had made use of him with hinted promises of adequate reward, but, his purpose having been served, had elbowed the man aside, unremunerated. The Brahmin, Nanda Kumar, then nearing his seventieth year, had vowed to be avenged.

With deep resentment Hastings hit at the proposal that Nanda Kumar be allowed to appear before the Council and give evidence. The Council, he said, had no right to act as his judges. The Honourable Members were overstepping their bounds. But the triumvirate insisted. "Are you not bound, Sir, by the votes of the majority? Do you presume to oppose the sense of the Parliament of Great Britain?" Hastings quit the Council in disgust, and at once the members started to discuss a second letter from Nanda Kumar: "I have the strongest written vouchers to produce in support of what I have advanced, and I wish to entreat for my honour's sake that you suffer me to appear before you to establish the fact by an additional incontestable evidence." The Council elected Clavering as President and passed a resolution that Nanda Kumar be summoned.

Maharajah Nanda Kumar appeared before the Supreme Council and produced serious charges of corruption against the Governor-General. He was only starting to build up his own funeral pyre! He was out to destroy Hastings but was himself destroyed. The majority ex-



amined his evidence and were satisfied. They declared the Governor-General guilty, ordered him to restitute the amount he had accepted, and recorded a minute: "Whatever might have been Nuncoomar's motives, his discoveries have thrown a clear light upon the Honourable Governor-General's conduct, and the means he had taken of making the very large fortune which he is supposed to possess, of upwards of forty lakhs of rupees, which he must have amassed in two and a half years."

At first Hastings was bewildered by the allegations. He questioned the right of his colleagues to judge his conduct and resented their impertinence, but made no attempt to meet the attack with a straightforward denial. Perhaps he had no other way. He who is today revered by British historians almost as a demi-god had undeniably taken, at any rate, one lakh and a half of rupees from Munny Begam. "Not as a bribe," his latest biographer Mr. Mervyn Davies tries to assure us, "but as a sumptuary allowance to cover the cost of entertainment during his lengthy visit to Murshidabad in 1772." Even this apologist is forced to admit: "The sum has reasonably been condemned as excessive and without sufficient justification," though he adds later: "He was justified by precedent." As if one could conscientiously accept bribes on the ground that someone else had done so before !

"The trumpet has been sounded," Hastings wrote to a correspondent at home, "and the whole host of informers will soon crowd to Calcutta with their complaints and ready depositions. Nuncoomar holds his durbar in complete state, sends for zemindars and their vakils, coaxing and threatening them for complaints, which no doubt he will get in abundance." In the same mail he appealed to the Prime Minister: "I now most earnestly entreat that Your Lordship—for on you, I presume, it finally

rests—will free me from the state I am in, either by my immediate recall, or by the confirmation of the trust and authority of which you have hitherto thought me deserving.”

Then the mood of despair gave place to a grim determination to fight it out. One day a man named Kamal-uddin, who had been one of his accusers, saw him privately and informed that Nanda Kumar had induced him to bring a false charge. Hastings at once made his plan. He sent the man to the Chief Justice and charged Nanda Kumar with conspiracy. While all Calcutta was seething with excitement over the Maharajah's allegations against the Governor-General, the course of events took a new dramatic turn. Nanda Kumar was arrested and released on bail. He was bound over to take his trial at the next assizes.

But the climax was yet to come. Within a fortnight Nanda Kumar was caught more firmly in the grip of the law. A creature of Hastings charged him with fraud in connection with a will executed five years before. The Supreme Court committed him to common gaol.

The trial started in a tense atmosphere and lasted for a week. There were twelve British jury-men. The Judges took the unusual course of cross-examining the defence witnesses, “and that somewhat severely” (P. E. Roberts). He was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged.

Why has this been called a “judicial murder”? The answer must be sought in the private life of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Sir Elijah Impey.

This man had been the closest friend of Hastings since their schooldays. His Indian appointment delighted the Governor-General. Impey has been rightly described by Macaulay as, after Jeffreys, the most notorious of all British judges. *Hickey's Gazette*, a contemporary Cal-

cutta journal, records that Impey with Mrs. Hastings disposed of the posts in the Governor-General's patronage:—"A displaced civilian, asking his friend the other day what was the best means of procuring a lucrative employment, was answered, "Pay your earnest devoir to Marian Allypore, or sell yourself soul and body to Poolbundy." Marian Allypore was Mrs. Hastings, and Poolbundy was the nickname of Impey who had earned it by indecently procuring for a near relation a contract for roads and bridges. Lord Cornwallis had the same low opinion of Impey and he had written to the President of the Board of Control regarding the man's appointment: "I trust you will not send out Sir Elijah Impey. All parties and descriptions of men agree about him"; and again during Hastings' impeachment: "I am very sorry that things have gone so much against poor Hastings, for he certainly has many amiable qualities. If you are in the hanging mood, you may tuck up Sir Elijah Impey, without giving anybody the smallest concern."

This was the man who presided over Nanda Kumar's trial: mean, unscrupulous, dishonest, and bound with Hastings by the closest ties of friendship. From the start he exhibited venom against the accused. Henry Beveridge in his voluminous work on the historical trial has concluded that Nanda Kumar did not commit a forgery. But supposing even that he was guilty, did he deserve to be hanged?

Forgery in India was a petty offence, though the English law made it punishable with death. Impey argued that Calcutta ought to be under English law since it was a great commercial centre. "Yet," Dr. Edward Thompson comments aptly, "the severe law did not apply to either Scotland or British North America, neither of them regions sunk in uncommercial barterdom." Besides, Nanda

Kumar's alleged guilt dated back to a time four years before the Supreme Court was founded.

Obviously, even if the charge was not a frame-up, the sentence was a travesty of justice and can well be described as a judicial murder. Hastings himself had declared : "If the Lord Chief Justice and his judges should come amongst us with their institutes, the Lord have mercy on us !" He had strongly held that it was the most cruel injustice to subject Indians to laws and penalties made for entirely different social conditions. Yet when Nanda Kumar petitioned him for a reprieve he let personal enmity get the better of all sense of decency.

Before Nanda Kumar there had been only one case of the capital sentence having been passed on an Indian for forgery (1765), and the man had been reprieved. But the most picturesque forger of the time was Clive. It is, indeed, a curious reflection that Clive, who today stands out in the imagination of British historians as a sort of miracle, committed a crime punishable by the English law of the time by death. He purchased the treachery of one of Siraj-ud-daula's men, Aminchand, at an agreed price of 20 lakhs. Two agreements were drawn up : the one on white paper, genuine, said nothing about this commitment; the other, on red paper, contained the fake transaction. Admiral Watson, the Governor of Calcutta, considered the sham document dishonourable and refused to sign it. Clive found a way out by a simple method—he forged Watson's signature! When Clive's purpose was achieved, Aminchand was bluntly told that he had been tricked.

The Nawab of Bengal sent in a petition on behalf of Nanda Kumar, stressing the man's services to the English, and pointing out that "the custom of the country" did not make forgery punishable with death : "nor, as I am

informed, was life formerly forfeited for it in your own country : this has only been common for a few years past." Impey snubbed the Nawab severely. He would not be baulked of his prey ! Nanda Kumar was brought to the gallows. He retained his cool courage to the last moment. The sight of the murder apparatus caused him no agitation. He himself gave the signal to the hangman. Calcutta was dazed with horror. No Brahmin in the town cooked his food on that memorable day.

"Nuncoomar may have been a most notorious scoundrel : but By God ! he spoke truth, else why were they in such a hurry to hang him ?" Francis commented. Only idiots and biographers, writes Macaulay, ever doubted that Hastings and Impey used the law to get rid of a personal enemy. Burke said in the House of Commons : "The Rajah Nuncoomar was, by an insult on everything which India holds respectable and sacred, hanged in the face of all his nation by the Judges you sent to protect the people, hanged for a pretended crime, upon an *ex post facto* Act of Parliament, in the midst of his evidence against Mr. Hastings. The accuser they saw hanged. The culprit triumphs on the ground of that murder, a murder not of Nuncoomar only, but of all living testimony, and even of evidence yet unborn. From that time not a complaint had been heard from the Natives against their Governors."

## HASTINGS FIGHTS A DUEL

“I DID hope that the intimation conveyed in my last minute would have awakened in Mr. Francis’s breast, if it were susceptible of such sensations, a consciousness of the faithless part which he was acting towards me. I have been disappointed, and must now assume a plainer style, and a louder tone.” Warren Hastings, the first Governor-General of India, was dictating to his private secretary. His voice was severe and cold, but level, and his long lean face without emotion. “In truth, I do not trust to his promise of candour, convinced that he is incapable of it, and that his sole purpose and wish are to defeat and embarrass every measure which I may undertake, or which may tend even to promote the public interests, if my credit is connected with them.”

He straightened himself and slightly lowered his voice. “I judge of his public conduct by my experience of his private, which I have found to be void of truth and honour. This is a severe charge, but temperately and deliberately made from the firm persuasion that I owe this justice to the public and to myself, as the only redress to both, for artifices of which I have been a victim, and which threaten to involve their interests with disgrace and ruin. The only redress for a fraud for which the law had made no provisions is the exposure of it.”

Markham, the private secretary, looked up with worried eyes. “But, Sir, Mr. Francis must take this as a

personal insult, or else he will be laughed at. Your words leave him no choice."

"That is precisely my intention," Warren Hastings replied grimly.

No two men in Calcutta hated each other with such bitter, relentless fury as he and a member of his Council, Philip Francis. Both desired power, authority, but each for a different purpose. Hastings, a man of steel, pursuing the vision of an Oriental Empire, resolved to tear up *Bhagya Jhanda*, the saffron flag of Maharashtra, and make the East India Company supreme in the peninsula. Philip Francis, nurtured in the Whig tradition, a political theorist with the siren voices of Locke and Voltaire in his ears, bent on saving Britain from indulgence in perilous Indian wars. Hastings, acting on the principle that an offensive was the best form of defensive. Francis, seeking safety in the practice of inaction. ("Let sleeping dogs lie," he might have echoed after Walpole). Hastings loving glory : Francis hating crisis.

The Regulating Act had created a curious situation. It had elevated the Governor of Bengal into the Governor-General of India, and lowered him almost to a nonentity ! The head of the Indian Government was encumbered with a Council of four members without whose assent he could take no action. Among the Councillors was Philip Francis, who had come out from England with the avowed intention of wrecking the policy of Hastings. "Sir," he addressed Hastings soon after he had arrived in India, "everything we expected to find white we found black." To Clive in England he wrote : "Mr. Hastings wholly and solely has ruined and sold Bengal." And to another correspondent : "Putrefaction is purity compared to the state of this settlement."

The Council was divided between the two rivals, the balance in favour of Francis. It was a rough, lone road the Governor-General had to travel—hated, feet chained.

The venom growing out of this nerve-racking situation was abundantly spilled in the above-quoted minute that Warren Hastings dictated to his private secretary. The fate of British rule in India was hanging in the balance. It was impossible to stand and mark time : the East India Company must march, or else the gathering winds in Maharashtra (Holkar was dreaming of new territory, Sindhia was engaging French officers) would swell into a tempest, and come blowing into Bengal.

Philip Francis read this indictment and at once wrote out a reply. "Mr. Hastings—I am preparing a formal answer to the paper you sent to me last night.... But you must be sensible, Sir, that no answer I can give to that paper can be adequate to the dishonour done me by the terms you have made use of. You have left no alternative but to demand personal satisfaction of you for the affronts you have offered me."

Hastings answered that he expected the challenge and was ready to accept it. The date was fixed for August 17, early in the morning, and the place was Belvedere on the outskirts of Calcutta.

On August 16th, the intervening day, the Governor-General settled his private affairs and wrote a new will. An entry of the same date in Philip Francis's journal says : "Employed in settling my affairs, burning papers, etc. in case of the worst—dull work."

It was the dawn of August 17. The eastern sky was flushed with hiding light. Colonel Pearse of the Bengal Army, whom Hastings had asked to be his second, called for the Governor-General. But it was only four o'clock, and Hastings lay down again for a half-hour.



They arrived at the selected spot riding in a "chariot", and found Francis with his second, who had come an hour before them. "The place they were at was improper for the business," writes Colonel Pearse. "It was the road leading to Alipur, at the crossing of it through a double row of trees that formerly had been a walk of Belvedere Gardens.....Mr. Francis proposed to go aside from the road into the walk; but Mr. Hastings disapproved of the place because it was full of weeds and dark. The road itself was next mentioned, but was thought by everybody too public, as it was near riding time and people might want to pass that way; it was therefore agreed to walk towards Mr. Barwell's house on an old road that separated his gardens from Belvedere." (Then the suburban residence of Hastings.)

Obviously the Governor-General meant business. He would not shoot in the dark and miss aim. When fourteen paces was mentioned, he assented only after observing that it was a great distance for pistols.

So they stood, facing each other in the increasing light of day. Colonel Pearse writes: "Both parties behaved as became gentlemen of their rank and station. Mr. Hastings seemed to be in a state of such perfect tranquillity that a spectator would not have supposed that he was about an action out of the common course of things, and Mr. Francis's deportment was such as did honour to his firmness and resolution."

A crowd gathered from adjacent villages, watchful, wide-eyed. Hastings was specially disturbed by the curiosity of an old woman, as he wrote later to his friend Lawrence Sullivan. He had fired a pistol only once or twice before. Francis had never used any. Neither of them understood duelling. Francis was the first to take aim. A lean man of middle height faced him calmly,

mouth firmly set, eyes, sharp and intense, the hair receding from his high lined forehead. Francis pressed the trigger. But his pistol missed fire, and had to be re-charged. "Again the gentlemen took their stands, both presented together, and Mr. Francis fired. Mr. Hastings did the same at the distance of time equal to the counting of one, two, three distinctly, but not greater. His shot took place. Mr. Francis staggered, and in attempting to sit down, he fell, and said he was a dead man. Mr. Hastings, hearing this, cried out, 'Good God! I hope not', and immediately went up to him."

They found that the shot had struck the right shoulder, but Francis sat up and shook hands with the victor. The wounded man was carried away on a stretcher.

Entry in Mr. Francis' Journal later in the day: "Mr Hastings sends to know when he may visit me."

Entry on August 18: "In these two days the pain I suffered was very considerable."

Entry on August 19: "Desire Colonel Watson to tell Mr. Hastings that I am forced to decline his visit."

Francis escaped with a slight wound, but something within him had died. He was no longer the same fighting man, wielding bitter malignant words. The bullet fired by Hastings put an end to the Indian career of his rival. For six years the man had occupied the stage, grimly fighting for his ideas, and combating those of the Governor-General. Defeated in the duel, frozen-hearted, he now resolved to throw up his work and return to England to enjoy his fortune of £80,000.

On the 3rd of December 1780, a ship of the East India Company named *Fox* set sail down the Ganges with Philip Francis among her passengers. It was a significant date in the history of the British Empire, for it marked the

close of one era in Hastings's career and the beginning of another. His hands were at last free. "In a word I have power," he exclaimed exultingly. He had a majority in the Council and could push through his far-flung scheme of aggression. Bull-dog persistence inherent in his character, was the secret of his successful execution of an imperialistic policy. His advice to John Macpherson, a member of the Council, is well worth quoting : "Deliberate well; resolve with decision, and completely, not by halves : but when your resolution is once formed, and in execution, never admit even a thought of withdrawing it, but persist in it, even though in itself it should be wrong, if not ruinously wrong."

## THE LION OF THE PUNJAB

**T**HE military commonwealth created by the commanding genius of Govind Singh pushed ahead through the storm and stress of the eighteenth century, developed, and at the same time dwindled. It grew immensely in man-power. The little community that the tenth Guru had founded in the hills of Kashmir became a formidable mass of horsemen, strong-limbed, warlike. But the Khalsa was no longer a compact body, the entire multitude acting as one man, riding to death and to victory under one supreme command. Sikh society had cracked to pieces. The Punjab was a waning confederacy of petty "fraternities", jealous of one another, without a common platform of action.

Franklin, a contemporary English chronicler, wrote, "The Sikhs are in their persons tall, their aspect is ferocious, and their eyes piercing; they resemble the Arabs of the Euphrates, but they speak the language of the Afghans.....their collected army amounts to 250,000 men, a terrible force, yet for want of union not much to be dreaded." The English traveller Forster, writing in 1783, made a similar statement, and added that an able leader who succeeded in uniting the Sikh people would attain to formidable power and become the terror of his neighbours.

While these words were being written, a child was growing up in the village of Gujranwalla, a child. Ranjit

by name, who was destined to weld the scattered vigour of the Sikhs, and bend it to the building of a new ruthless imperialism.

There was a bold robber in the Punjab named Buddha Singh, who rode his famous piebald mare Desi and made himself a terror of the countryside. Men trembled when they heard of him. Some forty wounds by sword, spear and bullet scarred his massive frame. But Buddha Singh died in his bed. His sons continued on the path of adventure, seized a number of villages and founded a petty principality.

A half-century later, Ranjit Singh, at the age of twelve, found himself hustled into the position of master of the confederacy. He had already taken part in campaigns. Once, when ten years old, death had missed him by a hair's breadth. His father was besieging a Muslim fort. There was a hand-to-hand fight. A Muslim soldier climbed the elephant on which Ranjit was seated and raised his sword to kill the boy. Not a moment too soon an attendant hacked him down.

Four years after he came into power, Ranjit Singh began his career of ambition. He attacked the Sirdar who had fought against his father and caused his death. "Withdraw !" commanded Sahib Singh Bedi, high priest at Amritsar. Ranjit Singh laughed in reply and continued the siege. The priest sent a message to the Sirdar : "They will not mind me, but God Himself will aid you." By a lucky chance that very night the river Beas rushed down in flood and sprang upon the assailant's camp. Ranjit Singh escaped with much difficulty.

But his martial instincts were now afire. He noted the political divisions in the Punjab, noted the weakness of the chiefs drawing each other's blood in needless strife and becoming weaker and weaker. "I will bring them

all to heel," grimly the youth muttered to himself. "The Land of the Five Rivers shall be one."

His first objective was Lahore. Thirty-five years had passed by since that dark night when two reckless sirdars had crept into the city through a drain, captured the deputy governor at a nautch, and become masters of Lahore by the morning. Their debauched sons who now ruled were weaklings who fled before the attack of Ranjit Singh. So in his twentieth year Ranjit was in command of the chief town in the Punjab.

The next move was against Amritsar. Capturing the town, the Sikh leader was in possession of the famous Zamzama gun, which Kipling has described in *Kim*. The tale of success was repeated again and again; hundreds of forts fell before Ranjit Singh's attack, till all the Punjab north of the river Sutlej was under his sway.

The horizon of the field of conquests now changed, drifting beyond the river, onward to Jind and Ludhiana. Maler Kotla and Patiala. It was Ranjit Singh's dream to pierce into the Cis-Sutlej states and bring the whole of Sikh land under his control. "All Khalsa shall form one kingdom under my rule," he said.

But the Cis-Sutlej states bordered on British territory. They were the buffers between the British and Ranjit. The policy of the Sikh Maharaja, it seemed, was laying the ground for a tremendous clash. The Cis-Sutlej chiefs were begging British protection. But at this moment there was etched on the political sky the figure of a short, thick-set man with piercing eyes, standing with arms bent over the chest, his face expressionless, his mind filled with the visage of world domination.

England and France had been at grips with each other for the spoils of imperialistic exploitation. The fierce contest had ended in the Treaty of Versailles (1783).

But French batteries barked again, thunderously, as never before. The flaming smoke of Austerlitz and Jena was seen from India. Napoleon, it seemed, was treading on the footsteps of Alexander and Timur Lang. He had schemes of founding a French Empire in India. The British Governor-General was racked with anxiety. In this hour of crisis he could not afford to make war on Ranjit. So he sent an embassy to the Sikh leader to cement the bonds of an alliance.

Metcalf, the envoy, could not give the needed assurance. Ranjit Singh played well the diplomatic game. It was far from his intention to fight a dangerous duel with the English. He had no love for France, but it was his plan that if the British desired his alliance against Napoleon they must be prepared to pay. He insisted on his demand, and while the negotiations were under way he annexed tracts of Cis-Sutlej territory. He carried his line of conquests down to the borders of Patiala.

But the political sky changed again. The danger of French invasion was gone. The Governor-General felt strong enough to act decisively. He intimated Ranjit Singh that the British Government would not allow the subjugation of the Cis-Sutlej chiefs and demanded that the Sikh army should be withdrawn to the north of the river.

Ranjit Singh was in a fury. He even prepared for war. Troops were mobilised and the fort at Amritsar was strengthened. General Mokham Chand, a bitter enemy of the English, was hurried down to the Sutlej. The British Government replied by sending a regiment to Ludhiana. Ranjit Singh was about to join his army and end a situation that had become intolerable for both the parties when he changed his mind, withdrew the garrison and signed a treaty of "perpetual friendship."

He never broke the letter of the terms. His dream of combining all the Khalsa under one leadership had gone to pieces. He now turned the direction of his conquests to the north, reducing Multan and Kashmir, and keeping the Afghans at bay.

He was now an absolute monarch. But his task was not completed. The urgent need was for a powerful standing army, and the Maharaja bent his fierce energies to this aim. The French officers, Ventura, Allard, Court and Avitabile found lucrative employment in the Sikh army. The formidable military machine thus created hurled itself after Ranjit's death against the British power in India, and shook it to the foundations.

What did he look like—this Sikh warrior who had carved a kingdom for himself out of the confusion that is known in Indian history as "The Great Anarchy"?

NAWAB SULTAN  
Numerous portraits of him are available. He has been a favourite subject for the ivory-workers of Amritsar and Delhi, who represent him in middle or old age. A contemporary writer, Baron Hugel, has left a vivid description of him. Ranjit Singh was short-statured, undistinguished in appearance. "I must call him," said Hugel, "the most ugly, unprepossessing man I saw throughout the Punjab." The greyish-brown skin of his face was darkly pitted with scars of small-pox. His left eye was blind. His short, straight nose was swollen at the tip and the skinny lips were stretched tight over his teeth. His grizzled beard, very thin on cheeks and upper lip, met under the chin in matted confusion and his head was too large for his height. He had a thick neck, thin legs, but small, well-formed hands.

Yet this ugly man, as soon as he mounted his horse, was wholly transformed. His body seemed animated by



the spirit within. Though one side of him was paralysed, he managed his horse with splendid ease.

Blind, weak, paralysed, he never lost his hold over the fierce chiefs of his court. One of these, arriving on a mission to the Governor-General, was asked by an English officer : "Which eye of the Maharaja is blind ?" The man answered : "The splendour of his face is such that I have never been able to look close enough to discover."

An excellent rider, who could all day remain unfatigued in the saddle, his fondness for horses amounted to a passion. He maintained an enormous stud collected from India, Arabia, and Persia. It was not surprising that he was crazy about the mare Laili, then as renowned as the Koh-i-noor itself.

The mare belonged to Yar Muhammad Khan, Governor of Peshawar. Ranjit Singh demanded her. On the owner's refusal he sent an army commanded by the French General Ventura to seize her. She cost him sixty lakhs of rupees and twelve thousand men !

No less strong was Ranjit's passion for diamonds. And eagerly he seized the opportunity of having the great stone Koh-i-noor. When Shah Shuja, who owned the diamond, fled from his Afghan home and sought refuge at Lahore, Ranjit Singh welcomed him. But he demanded the stone as the price of his hospitality. Shah Shuja denied that he had it with him. Ranjit offered him a large tract of land in exchange. "I have left it with a money-lender," the fugitive insisted. In reply, Ranjit Singh threatened him with imprisonment.

Worn out by pressure, the frightened Shah promised to surrender the diamond on condition that the Maharaja assured him of protection. This Ranjit did, taking a vow on the Adi Granth.

The Afghan invited him to come and take the diamond. Ranjit was received in silence. None spoke for an hour. Shah Shuja seemed a thousand miles away. Impatient, the Sikh reminded him of his promise. Shah Shuja asked a servant to bring the diamond. The man returned with a packet. Ranjit opened it, his hands trembling with excitement. His single eye narrowed with greed. Shah Shuja looked on, an image of stone.

## VENGEANCE IN KABUL

"THE field of my hopes, which had before been chilled by the cold blast of wintry times, has by the happy tidings of your Lordship's arrival become the envy of the garden of paradise....I hope that your Lordship will consider me and my country as your own."

Baron Auckland, the Governor-General, smiled as he recalled the words for the hundredth time. Dost Muhammad, the Amir of Afghanistan, had sent him a friendly message. But he did not care for the man. "Consider me and my country as your own!" Well, why not? Let Dost Muhammad come and live in Calcutta as an honoured prisoner. Let Shah Shuja, the East India Company's prisoner at Ludhiana, sit on the throne of Kabul. Afghanistan was the new cockpit of Asia. A British nominee over that treacherous, turbulent country was the easy solution of a difficult problem.

The thought repeated itself in his mind over and over, as he toured in India for two years and a half—receiving expensive presents, passing through famine-stricken areas where the great one's entourage pillaged the remnants that were left, witnessing with graceful languor (of which his sister and companion, Emily Eden, assures us in her inimitable journal) fierce combats between elephants, rhinoceroses and tigers.

Fear of Russia had been, for some decades, building the aims of British foreign policy. By the Treaty of Teheran concluded in 1809 Britain had agreed to help Persia against European invaders. But when in 1826 Russian battalions were pushing into Persia and the invaded country appealed to its ally, the British Government rescinded their treaty obligations. They put forward a false excuse that the Persians were the aggressors, though there was not the least room for doubt that it was otherwise. To help the Persians would be to incur a heavy expenditure in men and money. So the British Cabinet conveniently shelved their conscience and waved away the Treaty as a scrap of paper.

The defeat of Persia augmented Whitehall's dread of Russian power. The Czar's military outposts were still a thousand miles away from Indian frontiers. But then Russian agents were preparing a Persian attack on Afghanistan. The advance took place and Herat was besieged. The city was saved by a strange chance. A young British Lieutenant named Eldred Pottinger, who was then travelling in Afghanistan, entered Herat in the disguise of a Muslim fakir and organised a strong defence.

Meanwhile, a Russian embassy had entered Kabul. Dost Muhammad held it at arm's length. He preferred an English alliance, knowing nothing of the prejudice he had awakened in the unintelligent mind of Lord Auckland. When an official despatch arrived from India, he opened it with eager expectation. He read the message and sat stunned. He read it again and frowned indignantly. Auckland was asking him to break with Russia, but he would not lift a finger to protect him against an invasion.

Reluctantly, Dost Muhammad made up his mind. He received the Russian Mission. That was the only way to save the throne.

Then Lord Auckland made his decision. Dost Muhammad had dug his own grave, he told himself. He would make war on Afghanistan. The British Army would simply walk over the barbarous country. It would be a *promenade militaire*. With Shah Shuja as the puppet Amir, Afghanistan would be virtually part of British India.

The historian, Kaye, puts the blame on Simla, "where our Governors-General are surrounded by irresponsible counsellors, and which has been the cradle of more political insanity than any place within the limits of Hindusthan." P. E. Roberts writes: "The war was politically one of the most disastrous, and morally one of the least justifiable ever waged by the British in India."

Lord Auckland had no right to dictate to the Amir of Afghanistan. As an independent sovereign, Dost Muhammad was at liberty to seek alliance with any power. Presently, not a shadow of an excuse for invasion remained. The Russian Government, under diplomatic pressure from Whitehall, recalled their envoy from Kabul. He returned to St. Petersburg and shot himself in despair. But what if the menace from Russia faded away? Auckland had made a plan. Circumstances might shake themselves into a new form, but Auckland would not forgo the thrill of pulling an Amir into dust.

One crime begets another. So, the invasion was preceded by an act of robbery. There was urgent need of money to finance the troops. Auckland decided that the Amirs of Sind, who held a precarious, semi-independent position, must pay. They protested politely. In reply,

they were told: "The interests at stake are too great to admit hesitation in our proceedings....they who display an unwillingness to aid us in the just and necessary undertaking in which we are engaged, must be displaced, and give way to others on whose friendship and co-operation we may be able implicitly to rely."

While the Sind Amirs were fleeced, the terms of the Treaty which promised them that no military stores would be carried along the Indus were violated. The British army passed through Sind, plundering ruthlessly. When the Amirs protested, they had the answer: "Neither the ready power to crush and annihilate them, nor the will to call it into action, were wanting, if it appeared requisite, however remotely, for the safety of the Anglo-Indian Empire of frontier."

Thirty years before, in 1809, Shah Shuja had lost his throne, come fleeing into the Punjab, handed his famous diamond, Koh-i-noor, to Ranjit Singh in exchange for hospitality, and then settled down to a drab, uneventful life as the East India Company's pensioner. Back in his own country, he showed a taste for bloodshed. At Ghazni, which was stormed with dreadful slaughter, Shah Shuja murdered fifty Ghazni prisoners. He had always been hated in Afghanistan. Now he was detested. Kaye remarks: "The day of reckoning came at last; and when our unholy policy sunk unburied in blood and ashes, the shrill cry of the *Ghazee* sounded as its funeral wail."

When the Afghan pretender entered Kabul (Dost Muhammad had fled), "it was more like a funeral procession than the entry of a king into the capital of his restored dominions." No Afghan of repute came forward to do him homage. The very fact that he had been thrust upon the country from without spoiled his chances. So bitter was the people's hostility that without the support

of British bayonets he would not have swayed power for a single day.

Dost Muhammad was still a fugitive. "I am like a wooden spoon," he is reported to have said; "you may throw me hither and thither, but I shall not be hurt." On the other hand, the British troops were systematically harassed. Bands of Afghans sprang out as if from the earth itself and pounced upon British detachments with deadly effect. A Secretary to the Indian Government, Macnaghten, who had accompanied the army, wrote in despair: "At no period of my life do I remember having been so much harassed in body and mind as during the past month....The Afghans are gunpowder and the Dost is a lighted match. Of his whereabouts we are wonderfully ignorant."

One autumn morning Dost Muhammad showed himself. His Afghans carried a blue standard. They were tired and desperate. They charged fiercely, and the British troops were scattered. But the victor did not press in pursuit. Instead, he rode through the night and through the following day, reaching Kabul in the hour of twilight. He dismounted at the British cantonment, saluted Macnaghten and handed him his sword.

Macnaghten treated him civilly and sent him on to Calcutta, where he lived as an "honoured prisoner" with a pension of two lakhs of rupees.

The removal of Dost Muhammad however only added fuel to the flame. The atmosphere was so surcharged that the British troops could not think of evacuation. The officers regretted that the country was "not overflowing with beer and cheroots," but they amused themselves with skating, hunting, fishing, shooting and amateur theatricals. Once in a while Afghan "rebels" were hung, or blown from a gun. The British officers

liked the women of the country and sought love adventures with them. Their loose morals roused fierce resentment. The storm of unrest gathered speed and intensity, spreading from tribe to tribe, till the Duranis, Gilzies and many others rose in revolt. Then came the night of retribution. The men of Kabul attacked the house of a British officer one night, dragged him out and cut him to pieces. Next day they massacred some other British officers with their wives and children. The British troops stood a mile or two away, and made no attempt to save the victims until it was too late. By the evening, Elphinstone, the General commanding, wrote to Macnaghten: "We must see what the morning brings and then think what can be done."

The British troops had lost all *morale* and discipline. They were, in the words of Macnaghten, a "pack of despicable cowards." Often they fled before an attack, trembling with fear. Never had a British regiment suffered such bitter humiliation in Asia. One day the emboldened Afghans looted British supplies, the massed troops looking on not four hundreds yards away !

It was clear that the game was lost, and the choice lay between retreat and starvation. So Macnaghten concluded a treaty promising that the army would leave immediately and that Dost Muhammad would be released.

There followed the destruction of a British army (and of British prestige) in the rocky jaws of Kabul Pass. The retreat had begun. Sixteen thousand soldiers and camp followers struggled on through snow and starvation, grim tribesmen following vengefully at their heels. Sudden attacks mowed down hundreds of them. The attacks grew into a massacre. In a week it was all over.

Lord Auckland, shattered by the news, laid down office. His successor, Ellenborough, planned retribution.



British regiments forced their way through Khyber Pass, reached Kabul and blew up its great bazaar, "an inexcusable act of vandalism" (to quote Roberts). Then followed the cool, calculated sacking of Kabul. Kaye writes: "Guilty and innocent alike fell under the heavy hand of the lawless retribution....Many unoffending Hindus, who, lulled into a sense of delusive security, had returned to the city and re-opened their shops, were now disastrously ruined. In the mad excitement of the hour friend and foe were stricken down by the same unsparing hand."

Having done their job the army returned to India, and was warmly received by the Governor-General with triumphal arches. Then Ellenborough issued his bombastic proclamation to the Princes of India: "Our victorious army bears the gates of the temple of Somnath in triumph from Afghanistan, and the despoiled tomb of Sultan Mahomed looks upon the ruins of Ghuznee. The insult of eight hundred years is at last revenged. The gates of the temple of Somnath, so long the memorial of your humiliation, are become the proudest of your national glory, the proof of your superiority in arms over the nations beyond the Indus.

"To you, Princes and Chiefs, I shall commit this glorious trophy of successful war."

But the Hindus cared little about the gates, and the Muslims were offended. And unkind antiquarians pointed out that the gates were much later in date and could not have come from Somnath. In the end they were consigned to a lumber-room in the armoury at Agra!

## BRITAIN MAKES A "LITTLE WAR"

“THE Amir’s candle was burning at both ends!”

It was the candle of freedom. The hand that had set the flame was stained with innocent blood, yet immaculate, white-gloved, a hand that could do no wrong. The burning started at one end when that excellent hand wrested away Karachi, Sind’s only seaport, and its southernmost city. It started on the other end when Shikarpur on the northern border, the largest town in the Amir’s possession, was seized and annexed. Men not gifted with uncommon penetration would call it an unlawful encroachment on private property, a simple act of robbery. But they would be wrong. For the East India Company had “acquired by degrees that secondary moral force which belongs to utility irrespective of abstract justice.” In other words, might was not only right, but it gave one the “moral force” to take what one wanted. If minds of common calibre failed to grasp this high philosophy, surely it was their fault, and not that of the Governor-General, Lord Ellenborough, or his illustrious lieutenant, Sir Charles Napier.

Men, Ellenborough knew, were apt to prove themselves to be idiots. Of this the Amirs of Sind were not unlikely to provide an example. They might turn ungrateful to him, though he had kindly relieved them of the burden of Karachi and Shikarpur. So, “stimulated by the

lofty ambition of saving India from ruin," he addressed a few good words to the Amirs, and were not they themselves to blame if they were fools enough to construe the words as adding insult to injury?

"On the day on which you shall be faithless to the British Government sovereignty will have passed from you; your dominions will be given to others, and in your destitution India will see that the British Government will not pardon an injury received from one it believed to be its friend."

The British policy in Sind was entrusted to Sir Charles Napier, described by his brother Sir William as "a small dark-visaged old man with a falcon's glance." Trained under the Duke of Wellington, loving discipline and quick action, Napier was "always more under the influence of excitement than of reason."

The first step was to ask the Amirs of Sind to accept a new treaty. "But why these new and obviously penal terms," the Amirs asked, bewildered, "since we have never broken the old agreements? Why this unprovoked punishment?"

Napier was not the man to be so easily thwarted. He brought certain charges of disaffection against them. The charges were based on a letter, which was decided by all experts who saw it to have been forged. But once more Napier refused to be thwarted. Though blissfully ignorant of any Indian language, he declared the letter to be genuine. What hangman, indeed, would like to be deprived of his noose at the last moment?

In his heart of hearts Napier probably knew that the letter was a forgery. An entry in his diary is of interest. "We have no right to seize Sind, yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality it will be."

No less notable are the words of Major Outram, the Political Agent: "The information I obtained during my voyage up the Indus, and my previous knowledge of the Chiefs of Sind, satisfied me that the reports of their warlike preparations were unfounded; . . . . . I well knew that they were quite conscious of their inability to oppose our power; that they had no serious intention of that sort; and that nothing but the most extreme proceedings and forcing them to desperation would drive them to it. . .

"It grieves me to say that my heart, and the judgment God has given me, unite in condemning the measures we are carrying for his Lordship as most tyrannical—positive robbery. I consider, therefore, that every life which may hereafter be lost in consequence will be a murder. . ."

Then the people rose in fury. Major Outram escaped in a steamer. It was a God-sent chance. Sir Charles Napier thanked the Almighty for having struck the men of Sind with temporary insanity. Down he came marching with his troops. A clash took place at Miani, on the banks of a river. The Beluchis rushed up, grim-faced, thickly massed, guarding their heads with large dark shields, shaking their swords, shrieking thunderously with frantic gestures. The Irish troops received them with shouts as loud and shrieks as fierce. A hail of bullets, a roar of gunfire, and the foremost Beluchi masses rolled back in blood. Both sides exhibited extreme ferocity and lust for carnage. Napier, seeing a soldier about to kill an exhausted Beluchi Chief, called out to him to spare the man. But the soldier drove the bayonet deep, turned, and said in self-justification: "This day, General, the shambles have it all to themselves."

The British victory was complete. They lost only 275 men, against the Beluchi casualties of 6,000.

"Surrender" Napier's command rang in the streets of Hyderabad.

Messengers came from the humbled Amirs, begging for terms. "Life, and nothing more," Napier roared to them. "And I want your decision before twelve o'clock, as I shall by that time have buried my dead, and given my soldiers their breakfast."

Hyderabad was surrendered. The British entered the town full of greedy expectation, for the Amirs were reported to have hoarded a great wealth. But the loot proved disappointing. Another battle took place soon after with the Amir of Khairpur. The land was strewn with Beluchi corpses.

Then the British General issued his injunction: "If you come in and make your salaam, and promise fidelity to the British Government, I will restore to you your lands and former privileges, and the superintendence of the dawks. If you refuse, I will wait till the hot weather is gone past, and then I will carry fire and sword into your territories and drive you and all belonging to you into the mountains; and if I catch you I will hang you as a rebel. You have now your choice. Choose!"

The Amir, thus addressed, came. But he had six attendants with him. "Come alone and make your submission," Napier ordered. "Or I will in a week tear you from the midst of your tribe and hang you."

The Amirs were exiled. Sind became a part of British India. Napier was rewarded with £70,000 as his share of the booty. Ellenborough trumpeted over the grand achievement:

"To have punished the treachery of protected Princes; to have liberated a nation from its oppressors; to have added a province, fertile as Egypt, to the British Empire; and to have effected these great objects by ac-

tions in war unsurpassed in brilliancy, whereof a grateful army assigns the success to the ability and valour of its general; these are not ordinary achievements, nor can the ordinary language of praise convey their reward."

The conquest of Sind, having taken place soon after the disaster for British arms at Kabul, General Elphinstone commented sarcastically in England: "Coming after Afghanistan, it puts one in mind of a bully who has been kicked in the streets, and goes home to beat his wife in revenge."

Then Napier began to consolidate his conquest. To the nobles of Sind he said: "Take back your sword. You have used it with honour against me, and I esteem a brave enemy. But if forgetful of this voluntary submission you draw it again in opposition to my government, I will tear it from you and kill you as a dog." He hanged a good number of men, flogged more, and kept up a terror.

He had a contempt for the Civil Service which was, according to him "ignorant of great principles, devoid of business habits...while enjoying large salaries and the adulation of black clerks."

The administration he set up was of a pseudo-military type, cheap, and bluntly efficient. The following is an instance of his rough stiff justice: A man was sentenced to death for murdering his wife for no fault of hers. A Beluchi Chief expostulated with Napier on behalf of the condemned one: "But he was angry! Why should he not kill her?" Napier appreciated the force of this argument and said, "Well, I am angry. Why should I not kill him?"

One of Napier's deeds was worthy of praise. Sind was a Muslim country, but it had scattered groups of Hindus among whom *sati* was prevalent. Napier forbade it.

"But, Your Excellency, it is our religious custom," the Brahmans came to him and protested.

Napier watched them reflectively, and nodded his assent. Certainly the Brahmans could follow their time-honoured custom. Then he added: "My nation has also a custom. When men burn women alive we hang them and confiscate all their property. My carpenters shall therefore erect gibbets on which to hang all concerned when the widow is consumed. Let us all act according to national customs."

## INTELLECTUAL TIDE OVER BENGAL

**T**HE introduction of Western learning into India in the early years of the nineteenth century marked the first attempt of the British to cast an influence over the inner life of the Indian community. The aim was, in the words of Macaulay who conceived the project, to create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and in intellect." But years before Macaulay wrote his famous Minute on Education, thrusting with bold bitter words a new policy on the Government which he served, English had begun to be taught by two distinct bodies. First, there were the missionaries, whose aim was not to spread learning but to promote "the progress of vital Christianity." "A College may,—under the divine blessing—be of the utmost value to the establishment of genuine Christianity throughout India and Eastern Asia," the Baptist Mission stated in a prospectus. Secondly, there were the groups of educationists, both British and Indian, zealously intent on bringing about "moral and political improvement." Their work was preceded by that of several Eurasians whose motive was economic rather than philanthropic. The education consisted almost solely in committing English words and their meanings to memory. Little attention was paid to grammar and idiom. The pupils were made to learn a certain number of words by



heart every day. The Baptist missionaries, in giving certificates to their students, stated how many English words they knew. English-educated youths would thus ask their names of each other : "What denomination put your papa ?" In social gatherings they would test each other's knowledge by asking the spelling of such words as Xerxes, Kamschatka and Nebuchadnezzar !

The change came first in Bengal, and it was a sudden, tremendous transformation, storm-like in its effect, sweeping away old values, forcing new ideas, taking the Hindu community by surprise. One might call it an intellectual revolution, and like all revolutions it brought about only as much good as evil. It began with the founding of the Hindu College in 1817. David Hare and Ram Mohan Roy organised meetings of the chief Hindus of Calcutta, held in the house of the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court. A Committee was formed, comprising Indians as well as Europeans, and subscriptions were collected. But Ram Mohan Roy soon withdrew from the movement, strong objections having been raised by his orthodox countrymen to his association with it. The Hindu College was formed and controlled by orthodox Hindus who soon discovered, to their horror, that they had created a Frankenstein ! Rapidly the College produced a band of students who rose in revolt against the old order and made the institution a stronghold for ideas that were foreign and startlingly new.

Lord Ronaldshay observes that the wave of irreligion that overtook the student movement of Bengal was the inevitable result of pouring new wine into old bottles, rather than the outcome of the influence of certain individuals. This, perhaps, is half-truth. Indeed, a leader can never create a movement out of nothing. But again a movement seldom grows powerful without effec-

tive leadership. The leaders of the Bengal iconoclasts were David Hare, a watch-maker from Dundee who gave all his money and energy to the task of spreading English education in Calcutta, and Derozio, the most influential teacher in the Hindu College.

David Hare was one of the greatest pioneers of Western learning in India. No European ever mixed so freely and familiarly with the people of Bengal. But then he had discarded the dogmas of religion, preferring the guidance of ethics alone, and he filled the minds of his pupils with his own avowed scepticism. The following incident showed his anti-Christian attitude : a student of a missionary institution under Alexander Duff went to Hare, seeking admission in his college. Hare replied : "All Mr. Duff's pupils are half-Christians. I won't take any of them into my school. I won't take you; you are half-Christian. You will spoil my boys."

Even Hare's influence on the mind of the Bengali student, however, did not outstrip that of a youth of twenty, Henry Derozio. Hare was more enthusiastic than learned. He was more of an organiser than a teacher. He prepared the way along which Derozio was soon to sweep in a blaze of glory, for Derozio had in good measure what Hare lacked : learning. A Eurasian of Portuguese extraction, Derozio was born in Calcutta in 1809. Leaving his Calcutta school at the age of fourteen, the boy worked in an office for some time, then gave it up and devoted himself to reading and contemplation. He wrote articles for *The Indian Gazette*, edited by Dr. Grant. In 1826 he joined the Hindu College as junior teacher. The power of his pen had already given him an influence disproportionate to his years. The vigour of his personality enabled him to cast a spell not only over his pupils but also over the intellectual society of Cal-

cutta. A great enthusiast himself, he had the gift of imparting enthusiasm to others. Under him the acquisition of knowledge became a pursuit of absorbing interest. Not content with teaching in the College, he used to invite his pupils to his house and gave evening after evening to discussion and debate. This social intercourse promised to create a bond of sympathy between the two races. It is curious that Derozio, the free-thinker, had much in common with the missionary, Alexander Duff. Though differing completely in their religious opinions, both were able teachers and powerful intellectuals who desired to rouse the minds of their pupils to a state of ferment. And both succeeded in their object. Duff wanted to make Christians; Derozio was anxious to break the power of all religions; both within their respective circles succeeded in their object. There is no doubt, however, that the success of Derozio was far more spectacular. He did in two years what Duff took two decades to do. Circumstances were in Derozio's favour.

The first glimpse into the science and literature of the Western world filled Bengali students with astonishment and delight, and they resolved to cut themselves adrift from the ancient culture of their race. Derozio encouraged them to make full use of their newly found mental freedom, and, by an extraordinary domination over their thoughts, turned them into bold iconoclasts and fiery reformers.

"We have heard of scandalous orgies, where the most sacred mysteries and persons in the Gospels were parodied and blasphemed by English gentlemen for the amusement of the young Hindus," a writer stated in the *Calcutta Review*. "And it is notorious that their notions of the religion of Jesus were drawn chiefly from Paine's *Age of Reason*, and the pages of Gibbon and Hume." The

Bengali students' dislike of Christianity was equalled by their dislike of Hinduism.

This irreligion appeared on the crest of a wave which touched many other aspects of the mind. The spirit of enquiry stalked in the corridors of the Hindu College. Derozio formed his Academic Association, a debating society in which social problems were fearlessly discussed. The proceedings of the Association attracted much attention. The influence that it produced on the Bengali mind is obvious from the fact that about a dozen journals were started to discuss the views promulgated by the Association.

The Academic Association levelled a bold and uncompromising attack on Hinduism. It was declared that nothing but Western education could liberate the intellect of the people from its fetters. The emancipation of women began to be discussed. But, above all, a war cry was raised against caste.

The fire that had been smouldering for a decade burst into flames in the year 1829. In the swarm of debating societies that sprang up, modelled on the Academic Association, there was one universal execration of the Hindu religion. The students then carried the conflict into their homes, and the fathers of many were dismayed to find that education had induced their sons to renounce their ancient faith. Not a few Brahmin students were thrust into the family sanctuary in the expectation that they would find their way back to the religious fold. When this failed, the embittered guardians took to persecution. Many youths had to leave their homes and seek shelter elsewhere. As the months passed, the gulf between the old generation and the new became wider, and more frequent was the cry : "Down with orthodoxy, down with tradition." An incident brought matters to a crisis. In

1831, a student of the Hindu College threw roast beef into a neighbouring Brahmin's house shouting to the horrified inmates "Beef, beef !"

The Managing Committee had already passed a resolution prohibiting teachers from trying to unsettle the religious faith of the students. But the rising tide of irreligion could not be checked. Then the Committee took revenge on Derozio, regarding him as the "root of all evil." The majority of them passed a resolution dismissing him.

The influence of Derozio, "the master-spirit of this new era", did not cease with his removal from the Hindu College. The spring of 1831 saw his return to journalism, quickly followed by the founding of *The East Indian*. His home remained, as before, the meeting-place of young Hindu reformers. But suddenly the end came. The rainy season of that year brought an appalling epidemic of cholera. On December 17 Derozio caught the disease. He died, surrounded by the pupils who loved him, in his twenty-third year.

The Managing Committee of the Hindu College was wrong in fixing upon Derozio as the root of all evil. No man could have created the restlessness, the spirit of independence. It was the inevitable result of the new learning, in the light of which the old appeared shrivelled and worn. But Derozio, no doubt, helped to bring out the contrast, and give form to ideas of which his students had been dimly conscious. It was probably he who introduced to Bengali youths the works of Paine and Hume. At the same time it must be mentioned that the struggle in the Hindu College was part of a general struggle which was going on outside under the guidance of Ram Mohan Roy. Two years before Derozio's death Bentinck had issued his edict against *sati*. About the same time the Brahmo

Samaj had been founded by Ram Mohun Roy. The orthodox Hindus of Calcutta were panic-stricken. The extent of bitterness and despondency can be gauged from the fact that more than once attempts were made on Ram Mohun's life. The Brahmo leader's fight, however, differed completely in technique from the impatient struggle of the students of Calcutta. While the students were the vanguard of the disruptive movement, Ram Mohun Roy, by temperament a reformer and not a revolutionary, was striving to build. While the students lost discretion and accepted from Europe almost as much evil as good, he made no such mistake.

So the battle thickened. The mind of Bengal was awakening from an ancient death-like slumber. A renaissance was at hand. That renaissance came also to the rest of India, but by peaceful penetration and not in such a dramatic heated manner.

## RAM MOHUN ROY STARTS AN EPOCH

**R**AM MOHUN ROY inaugurated the modern age in India. He was born at a time when our country, having lost its link with the inmost truths of its being, struggled under a crushing load of unreason, in abject slavery to circumstance. In social usage, in politics, in the realm of religion and art, we had entered the zone of uncreative habit, of decadent tradition, and ceased to exercise our humanity. In this dark age of degeneration Ram Mohun rose a luminous star in the firmament of India's history, with prophetic purity of vision, unconquerable heroism of soul..... Through the dynamic power of his personality and his uncompromising spirit, he vitalised our national being with the urgency of creative endeavour..... He is the great path-maker of this century who has removed ponderous obstacles that impeded our progress at every step, and initiated us into the present Era of world-wide co-operation of humanity."

Such is the eulogy paid by Rabindranath Tagore, in the course of an address, to the greatest Indian personality of the nineteenth century.

Ram Mohun Roy was, according to a contemporary description, well-built, manly, robust, carrying himself with dignity. The eyes were dark, bright, restless. The lips full and firm. The forehead expansive. The nose Roman. He had graceful manners, a fascinating smile,

polite ways. One could not hold conversation with him without being deeply impressed. Here was, one irresistibly felt, a man who towered above his fellow men.

On the 22nd of May, 1772, there is some uncertainty about the year, but this date is supported by excellent evidence Ram Mohun Roy was born in the village of Radhanagar in Bengal. His parents were orthodox Hindus. Such indeed was the piety of his mother that, during the closing year of her life, she left the comforts of home and, in fulfilment of a vow, took up work as a menial servant in the Jagannath temple at Puri.

When he had finished his course at the village school he was sent to Patna for higher learning in Arabic and Persian, the latter then the Court language throughout India. At Patna he studied Aristotle, the Koran, and the Sufi philosophy. These studies destroyed the foundations of his religious belief. Back home, he felt more and more dissatisfied with the Hindu faith. There had been a time when, as a boy, he would take neither food nor even water without first reciting verses from the *Bhagabat Purana*. Now he was engaged in writing a treatise against image worship. His father, urged by curiosity, read the manuscript in secrecy and flew into uncontrolled passion. Sternly the old man rebuked his son for his apostasy. Ram Mohun countered with theological arguments. Nothing came out of it but the youth's conviction that he had arrived at a parting of the ways.

He left home at the age of seventeen, and journeyed thousands of miles on foot, wandering in the traditional Hindu manner in quest of knowledge. It is said that he even crossed the Himalayas into Thibet, the forbidden land, and his adventures would have ended fatally but



for the kindness of some Thibetan ladies who helped him to escape.

Returning, he settled down at Benares and began to learn Sanskrit, so that he might taste the joy of yet another adventure, this time an intellectual one; the Vedas indeed had more to offer than Thibet.

A few years later he took up an appointment in Bengal under the East India Company. In his leisure hours he worked hard studying Tantric works, the Jaina religion, and the English language. He pored over foreign newspapers and followed European politics with keen interest, specially the tempestuous course of the French Revolution. The struggle for freedom in that far land touched a sympathetic chord in his heart. There crashed on his ears the mighty cry of "Liberty, equality, fraternity." With heaving heart he pondered over the fall of the Bastille, and dreamed of other Bastilles, which caused no less a measure of human misery, crumbling into dust in his own land. In India, he reasoned, social evils were the first enemy. They stunted the national growth. And they could be destroyed only by prolonged, bitter struggle.

The first conflicts in which he engaged himself were, however, of a theological nature. He retired from service in 1814, settled down in Calcutta, and started his life-work. The following year saw the establishment of Atmiya Sabha, a society for the discussion of religious subjects.

A band of influential men gathered round him. Debates were arranged. Of these the most celebrated one was between Ram Mohun and Subrahmanya Sastri, a Madras Brahmin and champion of orthodoxy. On that occasion the leading citizens of Calcutta were entertained with the display of relentless, hammer-blow logic.

The controversies he led affected Hinduism on one hand, and Christianity on the other. He brought out a popular edition of the Upanishads, with translations and a preface in which he elucidated their monotheistic doctrines. Further, he published little tracts of his own, in more than one language, discussing a variety of religious topics.

A great agitation arose against the apostate in Bengal and spread down even to Madras. So volcanic it was that news of it reached England and France. Ram Mohun was subjected to angry social persecution, which he endured with patience. But as if it was not enough to disturb a single hornets' nest he threw stones into another. In the year 1820 he startled Hindus as well as Christians by publishing *The Precepts of Jesus*.

The Baptist Missionaries of Serampore furiously assailed the author who had pinned his admiration on the moral and spiritual values of the Gospels, but had ignored the "Miracles." This was the beginning of a heated debate, such as Bengal perhaps had never known. In his three *Appeals to the Christian Public* Ram Mohun displayed a deep Biblical learning, referring frequently to Greek and Hebrew originals. The outcome of this controversy was the sensational conversion of William Adam, a young Baptist missionary, to the Unitarian doctrines of the Upanishads.

The orthodox Christians were scandalised—so much so that the Bishop of Calcutta consulted the opinion of the Attorney-General in England if William Adam (he was sarcastically named "the second fallen Adam") could be deported for his act of heresy under some statutory provision. The Attorney-General replied that it was not possible.

The Unitarian Association was the root; the Brahmo Samaj, founded in 1828, was the tree. The "One-God Society" as it was popularly called, grew rapidly, and to counter its influence the orthodox Hindus of Calcutta united and created the Dharma Sabha, pledged to uphold the *status quo* in all religious and social questions. Each rival association had its own periodicals, and each appealed for popular support. The vilest abuse was poured on Ram Mohun Roy, and there was a time when his life was in danger. The net result of these controversies was that it gave journalism, new-born in Bengal, a splendid impetus.

To-day the Brahmo Samaj is extinct in all but name. But it has served a historic purpose. It arose in a period of intellectual restlessness when the wine of Westernism had intoxicated the youths and was drawing them into atheism. The Brahmo Samaj checked this tide, and even forced the tide into its own channel. Further, the Samaj did its best work in the field of social reform; however, their social ideals are to-day almost indistinguishable from those of Hinduism, and into the parent body the Samaj is now merging itself.

The reformers in the thirties of the last century were in bitter clash with orthodox Hindu society. While they worked for progress, the orthodox were all for reaction. The Dharma Sabha, richly supported by funds, set its face against every enlightened measure. In vain; for the reformers were fortunate in having the indomitable leadership of one who laughed at obstacles and hated to admit failure.

Even if Ram Mohan Roy had waged no other struggle but that against *sati*, he would have won a place of honour in the pages of history.

His horror for the terrible custom sprang from a family incident. In 1811 his brother Jag Mohun died,

and a widowed wife was burnt with the corpse. The sensitive mind of Ram Mohun was deeply shocked and he vowed not to rest till *sati* was abolished by law. He published tracts with evidence from the shastras that immolation of a widow was not obligatory.

In 1818 Government enforced certain Regulations to restrict the practice. Orthodox Hindus, alarmed and alert, petitioned for their repeal. Ram Mohun hastened to submit a counter-petition. Further, he formed batches of volunteers who went about and saw that the Regulations were obeyed and no widow was burnt against her will.

In December, 1829, Lord William Bentinck issued his famous anti-*sati* Decree. Ram Mohun rejoiced. Then swiftly he returned to the heat of the struggle and thwarted the attempts of the Dharma Sabha to have Bentinck's Decree repealed. He hacked argument with argument. He countered petition with petition.

His championship of Hindu women continued after this victory. He upheld women's right to inheritance of property. He decried polygamy, supported widow re-marriage.

There were other struggles, too, waged on the social front. Ram Mohun was a staunch advocate of English education, and he stressed the need of teaching Mathematics, Chemistry and Anatomy. "The Sanskrit system of education," he said, "would be the best calculated to keep the country in darkness."

"Love of freedom was perhaps the strongest passion of his soul," wrote his friend William Adam. Ram Mohun advocated liberty of the Press and strove for the repeal of a restrictive Ordinance first in the Supreme Court and then in a public petition to the King of England. A free press, he declared, was the essential condition for good government.

His political views were the outcome of his love of liberty. His cosmopolitan outlook was surprising in that age of narrow vision. He had keen sympathy for political movements in Europe. In 1821, the people of Naples who had secured a constitution from their King were crushed back into servitude. "My mind is depressed by the late news from Europe," Ram Mohun wrote in a letter. "I am obliged to conclude that I shall not live to see liberty universally restored to the nations of Europe, and Asiatic nations, specially those that are European colonies....I consider the cause of the Neapolitans as my own, and their enemies as ours. Enemies to liberty and friends of despotism have never been and never will be ultimately successful." Some time after, rejoicing in the news that Spain had won a constitutional government, he gave a public dinner in the Town Hall. The success of the second French Revolution was equally exhilarating. "So great was his enthusiasm that he could think and talk of nothing else."

He longed to visit Europe, then tossed by great political storms. An opportunity came when he was asked by the titular Emperor of Delhi to go out as his Envoy and plead his cause before the authorities in England. The voyage round the Cape took nearly five months. "As soon as it was known in London that the great Brahmin Philosopher had arrived, the most distinguished men in the country crowded to pay their respects to him." On the streets he was greeted with the cry of "Tippoo !" (as, to-day, Indians are similarly greeted with the cry of "Gandhi!")

But he never returned to his homeland. He lay dying in Bristol, one autumn day in 1833, the sacred word 'Om' on his lips.

## A MOMENT IN THE MUTINY

**T**HERE was no moon, but the sky was bejewelled with stars. A night in mid-September. Two British engineer officers accompanied by a number of picked riflemen halted at the edge of a jungle.

The fortifications of Delhi loomed ahead—walls intersected with towers and bastioned fronts, mounted with guns. The walls, fifteen feet thick at bottom, carried a parapet loop-holed for musketry, and protected in the exterior by a dry ditch twenty feet in depth and twenty-five in width. Beyond the ditch was a jungle of thick brushwood. At the edge of the jungle were planted British batteries, belching a destructive fire on the enemy defences.

The rebels had answered boldly, raking the British batteries, silencing a few guns, keeping up a continuous musketry fire. The besiegers were determined to take Delhi, for without it the Indian Empire was lost. The besiegers were bent on defending it, for with Delhi as the storm centre of their movement the war of independence might be won.

Two engineer officers, Medley and Lang, crept through the starry night towards the Kashmere bastion. They were out to examine a breach at close range and ascertain whether it would let in storming columns. Undiscovered, they reached the edge of the ditch. Lang slid down the

counterscarp, sixteen feet deep. Medley descended by means of a ladder. Suddenly there was a rush of feet. Sepoys were running to the breach. Quickly the British officers re-ascended the ditch wall for fear of discovery, and flung themselves on the shaded grass. Not twenty yards away stood rebel sepoy with loaded muskets. Lying motionless, Medley and Lang gazed at the breach. Their hearts beat quickly as they saw that the breach in the wall was wide, unprotected by guns in the flanks, and that the slope of the ditch was easy of ascent.

Their report decided the course of events. General Willson, the commander, realised that the time had ripened for an offensive. Delay was dangerous. The climax must be forced, in spite of tremendous risks. So he issued the orders: at daybreak the following morning the assault should be delivered.

It was the 14th of September. In the early hours of night there was a severe artillery duel. Then a bugle sounded. Like hawks unleashed the 60th Rifles dashed forward with a "Hurrah!" firing as they went. The engineers, Medley and Lang, went ahead, waving their swords and showing the way. The British batteries were hushed, but rockets and shot and shell came bursting like a tornado from the bastioned wall, terrific, incessant. Advancing through the fire the stormers reached the edge of the jungle and then rushed to the ditch. The muskets of the enemy barked with such fatal effect that for ten minutes the stormers could not let down their ladders. "Man after man was struck down," writes Medley; "the enemy with yells and curses kept up a terrific fire, even catching up stones from the breach in their fury, and, dashing them down, dared the assailants to come on."

Then the ladders were fixed. With lightning rapidity the soldiers slid into the ditch, mounted the scarp and

scrambled up to the breach. Bayonets glinted in the dawnlight. Swords whirled. The rebels gave way. The Kashmere Gate was won.

This was the work of the first column. Other columns had been similarly in motion, storming other breaches in the wall. Officers of the third column blew up the Kashmere Gate with splendid audacity. Advancing into the hottest fire with bags of powder, five of them dashed to the foot of the Gate, laid them down and tried to light the fuse with portfires. Three of them were shot dead, but not before the fuse had started to burn. Then followed a terrible explosion; the great double gate was smashed into pieces. Loud sounded a bugle. The third column rushed ahead, onward through the massive ruin of wrought iron, forcing its way into the bazaar, and further to Chandni Chauk and to the Jamu Masjid. Here it halted. The Masjid was seething with rebels. Every house on the streets poured out missiles and bullets of all sorts. The third column struggled to take the Masjid, but was forced to retire to the large enclosure of Begum Bagh.

Meanwhile, the second column had captured the Kabul Gate and pressed into the town. The fourth column, however, was defeated. The rebels barricaded the streets and destroyed the assailants with a steady fire, killing their commanding officer.

The 14th of September, 1857, became a red-letter-day in British military annals. Unleashed by a bugle-call, General Wilson's army had stormed through the battered walls into the heart of Delhi, taken up positions and raised nests of guns. A solid base of operations had been gained. But losses had been enormous, amounting in less than six hours to sixty-six officers and more than eleven hundred men. The outcome hung still in the balance. The rebels



were still strong. With a hammer-blow attack they could even yet wipe out the assailing army.

"It is not too much to affirm," a British historian writes, "that a retrograde movement on the 15th would, for the time, have lost India." But a strange inaction had come upon the rebels. They did little else but keep up an ineffectivve fire from the powder magazine. Men who wielded the power to decide the destiny of their country lost their nerve at the peak of the crisis. The leaders of the Mutiny were seized by confusion, saw darkness all round, hesitated, and were lost.

The British army, too, was under the command of an officer who hesitated and had no hope of ultimate victory. Repeatedly on this day General Wilson planned to retreat from his occupied position to one of greater safety. The British cause was saved by the engineer officers who argued forcefully against retreat and buoyed up the sinking spirits of their General.

At dawn, on the 15th September, the British army occupied the suburb of Kishanganj which the rebels had evacuated in the night. It was here that the rebels had repulsed the 4th column. Deeply impressed by its strategic value and strength the besiegers wondered why the position had been surrendered. They wondered much more when they were able to storm without serious resistance the powder magazine containing a hundred and seventy-one guns and huge quantities of ammunition.

Even after the capture of the magazine, an event of the highest importance, General Wilson despaired of victory and was against a forward movement. But once more the engineer officers had their way. They pushed on, avoiding the streets and sapping through the walls of houses, and led their men close to Chandni Chauk and

the palace. All this time the city and the palace were subjected to heavy bombardment.

On the 18th of September, General Wilson was once more seized by despondency. That day an advance was being made down a narrow lane which led into Chandni Chauk through a gate at its end. The gate had been closed against the stormers. Suddenly it flew open and revealed a 24-pounder! The gun opened fire on the column, and at the same time a hail of bullets came from the flanking houses. The British troops were routed.

"We are still in the same position in which we were yesterday," General Wilson wrote in despair. "An attempt was made this morning to take Lahore Gate, but failed from the refusal of the European soldiers to follow their officers. One rush, and it would have been done easily; but they would not make it. The fact is, our men have great dislike to street-fighting. This is very sad, and, to me, very disheartening. We can, I think, hold our position, but cannot see a way out at all. I have now only three thousand one hundred men (infantry) in the city....If I were to attempt to push on into the city, they would be lost in such innumerable streets and masses of houses, and would be annihilated or driven back."

Inexorably the sapping process went on, through rows of houses. On the 20th September the Lahore Gate was stormed, followed by the capture of the Juma Masjid and the Imperial palace. Bahadur Shah, the Mughal sovereign (the imperial status was gone; he was a shadow king) had fled. The palace became the headquarters of General Wilson.

On the night of the 19th September the commander-in-Chief of the rebel army, Bakht Khan, left Delhi over a bridge of boats with thousands of his soldiers. He had striven hard to take Bahadur Shah with him. The Eng-

lish had conquered Delhi (he argued), but a long-drawn guerilla war could be waged in the vast spaces of the open country with a considerable chance of success. The name of Bahadur Shah would be a rallying-cry. The mutiny would develop into a war of liberation. All Hindusthan would rise.

There was a noble in Delhi named Ilahi Baksh Mirza, selfish, wily, without any scruples. Convinced that the English would triumph, he had secretly planned to win their favour. His first move was to speak to Bahadur Shah after Bakht Khan had left. He pointed out the perils and fatigues that would befall the sovereign if he went with the rebels whose ultimate defeat was certain. On the other hand, by surrendering at once to the victors he might convince them that he had joined the mutineers under compulsion.

Bahadur Shah, old and decrepit, decided on surrender. The road was now clear for Ilahi Baksh Mirza. His plan was to betray the sovereign. With that intention he communicated with Rajab Ali, a reputed spy in British service. Rajab Ali asked him to detain the sovereign at Humayun's tomb after the rebel leader and his men had left.

The King met Bakht Khan at the appointed spot and told him his decision. Bakht Khan gave him a contemptuous look and went his way. Soon after, there arrived at Humayun's Tomb Major Hodson and his men.

"Some men are born in advance of their age, others too late for it. Of the latter class was Hodson." So wrote a contemporary English historian. "He was a *condottiere* of the hills, a free-lance of the Middle Ages. He joyed in the life of camps, and revelled in the clang of arms. His music was the call of the trumpet, the battlefield his ball-room. He would have been at home

in the camp of Wallenstein, at the sack of Magdeburg. In him human suffering awoke no feeling, the shedding of blood caused him no pang, the taking of life brought him no remorse..... (His joy was) in the slaughter of the fugitives, the spoils of the vanquished."

He enjoyed heartily that ride to the tomb of Humayun. His only regret was that he was to convey Bahadur Shah back to Delhi, alive. On the 30th August he had written in his journal : "If I get into the palace the House of Timur will not be worth five minutes' purchase, I ween." Four days after his capture of the Mughal sovereign, he wrote : "I would much rather have brought him into Delhi dead than living."

Palanquins came out of the tomb gate, where Hodson awaited his prisoners. The Queen and her son went first. Hodson spurred his mount to the King's palanquin as it came, and asked him to surrender his arms.

"Are you Hodson Bahadur?" queried the timid old man.

Arriving at the palace the captive King sought an interview with General Wilson. But the General refused to see him.

Hodson had regretted that he could not kill the Mughal. However, luck favoured him. A spy brought him news that two of Bahadur Shah's sons and a grandson had not surrendered themselves, but were hiding in Humayun's Tomb. Hodson jumped at the news. At last his blood-lust was going to be sated.

With a hundred horsemen he galloped to the tomb, seized the princes and took them in covered carts up the Delhi road. When within a mile of Delhi, he ordered the princes to come out on the road and strip to their underclothes. "The Government wills that these butchers should die," grimly he addressed the troopers. Then he

took aim with a loaded carbine and shot the helpless captives dead, one by one.

Two days later, he wrote : "In twenty-four hours I disposed of the principal members of the House of Taimur the Tartar. I am not cruel, but I confess that I did rejoice in the opportunity of ridding the earth of these ruffians."

Bahadur Shah was exiled to Rangoon and died there. Of the two other sons he had besides those shot down by Hodson, one, Feroz Shah, a brave soldier, escaped from Hindusthan, and he was later seen near about Mecca, a beggar on the wayside. The other son, Fakhruddin, took up service under a British officer as his servant with the alleged purpose of spying on him, but he was found out and shot through the leg. He was left for dead on the street, but recovered, living on in Delhi as a crippled faqir, unknown to the authorities and revered by the people. According to Dr. Edward Thompson, descendants of the Great Mughals are still to be found in Delhi. One is said to have been hurt accidentally by the Duke of Connaught's car, when plying a *tikka ghari* !

## PRESS ACT: MUZZLES ON, MUZZLES

**T**HE censorship of the press involves far-reaching questions of principle, as well as policy. No one discussed the matter with more frankness and insight than Munro (then Governor of Madras) in 1822. "A free press and the dominion of strangers are things which are quite incompatible and which cannot exist together," Munro had written; "for, what is the first duty of a free press? It is to deliver the country from a foreign yoke, and to sacrifice to this one great object every measure and consideration." Munro had further said that a free press would spread the principles of liberty among the people, and stimulate them to establish a national government; and that the danger would come not from the unorganised people, but from the well knit sepoy army. Imbued with the spirit of liberty, the army would wage a war of independence : in short, the outcome of a free press would be "insubordination, insurrection and anarchy."

Was the Sepoy Mutiny the fulfilment of this prophecy? It is hard to speak on this matter with the voice of decision. The following facts, however, should be noted. The educated Indians who had imbibed the principles of liberty through a free press had no desire for armed revolt. The mutineers were mostly illiterate. There were at this time no popular newspapers distributed on a large scale. The political passions of the sepoys

may have been stirred by the handwritten *akhbars* which were in circulation, rather than by printed matter. And having noted these facts one might ask : Was it not possible for the Government to take measures for insulating the sepoy army from the contamination of political ideas ?

The principles of liberty, however, were suggested to the Indian mind at the beginning not so much by a free press as by missionaries. It was not possible to censor the lessons of English history, the teaching of English political philosophy, and the romantic yearnings of English poetry. All these were, in the long run, sources of "danger" Safety might have lain in the patronage exclusively of Oriental learning by the Government. But even that could not altogether preclude danger, for other bodies would have established schools and colleges. Some Bengali gentlemen established the Hindu College many years before the Government of India had decided to spread the knowledge of English literature and science.

A year after Munro's Minute was written, on March 24, 1823, John Adam issued an ordinance imposing a series of press restrictions. In those days an Ordinance issued by the Governor-General was not valid within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Court until it had been exhibited for three weeks in the Court and registered by the Judges. A number of prominent Indians led by Ram Mohun Roy and Dwarkanath Tagore took the opportunity to address a memorial to the Supreme Court, praying that the Judges would refuse to sanction the Ordinance. The Memorial was rejected. The next step of Ram Mohun was to address a petition to the King-in-Council, praying for a revocation of the Ordinance. This also failed.

The desired freedom came in 1835. Early in that year a public meeting was held in Calcutta to petition

the new Governor-General to repeal the press Regulations. Dwarkanath Tagore and David Hare were among the speakers. Sir Charles Metcalfe granted the petition, declaring that the promotion of knowledge could best be effected by means of a free press. The Home authorities severely reprimanded him for his "unjustifiable" procedure. But they did not disallow it.

A temporary Press Act was passed in 1857 to tide over a crisis. This "Gagging Act", as it was called, was resented by Europeans on the ground that it brought the Anglo-Indian and the Indian press under the same restrictions. The Act expired with the suppression of the Mutiny, but the Government of India decided to end its isolation from the press. Special attention began to be paid to newspapers in Indian languages. In Bengal the official translator was entrusted with making weekly abstracts from the vernacular press. These were forwarded to the Government of India and to the Secretary of State, and inquiry was frequently made as to the truth of the statements printed.

In a despatch dated June 9, '1875, Lord Salisbury called the attention of the Government of India to certain articles published in the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, of which the tendency was, he said, to justify the attempt to poison the Resident at Baroda. "To emasculate a nation that the Government may rule without trouble ! Surely to poison an obscure colonel is by far a lighter crime," the journal had remarked. After consulting with the Advocate-General, Lord Northbrook decided that though the articles fell under the Indian Penal Code a prosecution would be undesirable, since it was likely to cause more public excitement than the printing of the attack itself.

The vernacular press drew the attention of Lord Lytton soon after his arrival in India. He wrote a



Minute, embodying certain suggestions for the better control of that section of the press, and had it confidentially circulated among the Local Governments with a request that they would state their opinions. The Local Governments, excepting Madras, unanimously supported these proposals. The Governor of Madras opposed the muzzling of the press. With regard to the twenty-three selections (annexed to the Minute) from various papers of seditious writings that had appeared during the previous eighteen months, the Governor observed : "Some of these elegant extracts no doubt savour of disaffection. Many in no way exceed the limits of criticism by a free press, although they may state unpalatable truths in strong language." He added that the vernacular press was a useful indication of the under-currents of local feeling; that if any serious spirit of disaffection appeared among the people, indications would float up to the surface through their newspapers; and that the Penal Code was sufficient to punish systematic attempts at sedition.

After considering the opinions of the Local Governments, Lord Lytton decided to introduce a press law. He sent a telegram to the Secretary of State stating that "the increasing seditious violence" of the native press, "directly provocative to rebellion", required a quick and stringent restrictive measure. A Bill had been prepared, and he proposed to pass it, without discussion, at a single sitting of the Council. The Secretary of State telegraphed on the following day, approving of the proposal. That same day the Vernacular Press Bill was entered on the Statute Book. It empowered District Magistrates to call upon the printer and publisher of a newspaper to enter into bonds not to print anything likely to excite feelings of disaffection to the Government. If a newspaper contained words or signs of the above description, the Local Gov-

ernment could issue a warrant to seize and forfeit its plant.

It is interesting to note that a minority at Whitehall strongly opposed the Act. Three members of the Council of India voted against it, though the remaining ten were in its favour. Sir Erskine Perry, who had been Chief Justice of the Supreme Court in Bombay, was most emphatic in his protest. Describing it as a "retrograde measure", which would irritate Indians by brandishing before them invidious distinctions of race, he said that he would struggle to the utmost to have it repealed. He agreed with the Governor of Madras that the offence of the press consisted in stating unpalatable truths in strong language. An unshackled press was useful to the Government, since it was the only medium for ascertaining public opinion. The remarks of Muir were equally unhesitating. A free press, he said, was the most effective means of elevating the national mind. "If it becomes really a question between a free press and our hold in India," declared Colonel Yule, who also opposed the new law, "I am certainly not going to say 'perish India !' but quite the opposite." A free press might, he added, be a necessary substitute for a parliament in the country.

Was the vernacular press in general preaching sedition at this time? Sir Alexander Arbuthnot, introducing the Bill to the Council, quoted some extracts. According to the vernacular press, he said, the British Government was monstrous in its nature, since it had been destroying its own children. The history of the Government was a history of non-fulfilment of promises. The *Kasht Vilashi*, a Poona newspaper, compared the Government in India to a cunning traveller who, after having been received in the house of a hospitable gentleman, gradually contrived to oust him and usurp his property. But there

would be no difficulty, the paper added, in driving out the usurper if all Indians jointly made a bold attempt to do so. The *Malwa Akhbar*, published from Indore, wrote of a rumour that Nana Sahib was about to invade India with Russian troops—a welcome news, since the oppression of European officials had become intolerable. One Bengal paper said that the English had become enervated from addiction to luxury, and their Empire would come to a disastrous end like those of Alexander, Caesar and Bonaparte. The *Kiran* of Bombay commented that the English had acquired India more by diplomacy and craft than by bravery.

These extracts, culled from the extremist wing of the vernacular press, were described by Lytton as “poisonous matter.” Then again Lytton’s extracts were not fair samples. Torn from their context, they assumed a different tone and gave a wrong impression. The vernacular periodicals wrote against foreign domination, and yet they did not hesitate to mention the benefits derived from it. They used as much soothing oil as vitriol. It would be unfair to say that the soothing oil was intended to appease Government, while the vitriol was to create disaffection in the minds of the people. In the absence of a restrictive Press Act the vernacular newspapers might as well have concentrated all their fire on the foreign rule, and drawn a smoke-screen over the good things that the aliens had brought.

Then again the British Government could well have decided to remain tolerant, conscious of its immense strength. The vernacular press in India was small and without much influence. The total weekly circulation of all its papers put together did not exceed a hundred and fifty thousand, these being distributed among some two hundred newspapers. The average sale of a newspaper

was 500 copies. The *Amrita Bazar Patrika* created a sensation with its sale of 2,217 copies but this was exceeded by the *Sulav Samachar* which reached the then astounding figure of 3,000.

The new Act was regarded by Indians as "a bolt from the blue", and the two-year-old Indian Association came forward to launch the "first great political demonstration of the middle-class community" in the country. Surendra Nath Banerjee took the lead. A petition was sent to Gladstone, who was then on the Opposition benches. A lively debate took place in the House of Commons on the Press Act, Gladstone declaring that the law was without justification. Educated Indians began to pin their faith on the Liberal Party. "We devoutly pray for the overthrow of the present ministry," the *Bengalee* wrote, "and look forward to the time when the Liberals will again be restored to power."

But disillusionment came after three years, when the Liberal Party formed the Government. The Cabinet spokesman declared that they could not "agree to the hasty repeal" of the press law. Indians received the news with bitterness. The *Bengalee* pronounced "a heavy sentence of condemnation" upon the Liberal Government, saying that it had broken a pledge. The political morality preached by British statesmen, the paper said, was empty as "sounding brass."

Then came December 7, a day of rejoicing in Indian political annals. On that day a surprise Bill was introduced into the Supreme Legislative Council, repealing the Press Act and restoring liberty to the vernacular press which was described as "a Parliament always in session." The repeal was the result of confidential correspondence between the Secretary of State and Lord Ripon.

This measure had no little psychological effect on Indians. They regarded it as the triumph of sustained agitation and combination for a specified purpose. The defeatist tendencies received a set-back. It became obvious that much could be gained from a despotic government by the mass pressure of public opinion. Lord Lytton had kindled indignation : Lord Ripon kindled hope. Regarded in historical perspective, it would appear that Lytton, no less than his successor, helped to awaken the political consciousness of Indians.

## TEMPEST OVER THE ILBERT BILL

**I**NDIAN nationalism in the early years of the 1880's found its best expression in sentimental tears. Once in a while it spoke hard words. But prayers (first in little groups, then on a mass scale) formed the core of political agitation. Great faith was pinned on their efficacy, all the more so when the Vernacular Press Act was repealed. It was with startled amazement that Indian leaders watched the emergence of a technique that threatened, not begged.

This development was the unexpected outcome of a Bill introduced into the Supreme Legislative Council for investing Indian magistrates and judges with criminal jurisdiction over European British subjects. Until 1872 a European British subject could be tried only in the courts of the Presidency towns. When the Code of Criminal Procedure was revised in that year, two important changes with regard to this matter were made. First, an extremely limited jurisdiction was conferred upon the district courts over Europeans residing in India: for instance, a Sessions Judge could sentence an Indian to death while he could only send a European to prison for twelve months; a first-class Magistrate could sentence an Indian and a European to penal servitude for two years and three months respectively. Secondly, the equality on which all judicial officers, irrespective of race, had stood, was

removed, and it was enacted that the new jurisdiction conferred upon the local courts was to be exercised only by European officials.

An anomalous position threatened to be created in consequence of the second provision. What would happen if a European British subject was charged with a criminal offence in a district administered by an Indian ? The Indian District Magistrate could neither try him nor even commit him for trial, but he would have to transfer the case to a junior European colleague or else the offender would have to be tried by a European District Magistrate of another district. In either case, the prestige of the Indian District Magistrate would suffer. And in practice, this position was likely to limit the appointment of Indians to districts which were inaccessible and rarely visited by Europeans.

A protest against this state of things came first from a civilian named B. L. Gupta, who as the Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta already exercised jurisdiction over Europeans but would lose that powers in the following year with his promotion to the more responsible post of Sessions Judge.

Sir Ashley Eden, then Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, submitted Gupta's note to the Government of India with his approval, saying that the desired jurisdiction should be given on the ground of policy as also administrative convenience. The Government of India under Lord Ripon considered the proposal favourably and despatched circulars inviting the opinions of Local Governments. "An overwhelming consensus of opinion" supported the removal of the bar. Reviewing the papers, the Government of India submitted to the Secretary of State the outline of a measure by which, first, all District Magistrates and Sessions Judges would be vested with the re-

quired power by virtue of their office; and secondly, the Local Governments would be permitted to confer this power upon those members of the Covenanted and Statutory Civil Services who were, in their opinion, fit to be entrusted with it. Lord Hartington approved of this proposal, and Ilbert, the Law Member, introduced into the Legislative Council a Bill to amend the Code of Criminal Procedure.

At once a furious opposition sprang up against the measure. Three weeks later a great meeting of Europeans took place in Calcutta attended by nearly 3,000, including a number of Civil Servants and Army officers. A resolution was passed declaring that the Bill was "unnecessary in the interests of justice, uncalled for by any administrative difficulty, based on no sound principle, founded on no experience," and that it would imperil the liberty of European British subjects. The most provocative speaker at the meeting was a lawyer named Branson, who seconded the resolution, saying: "Englishmen will not hand over the custody of their liberties to such a nation as the Hindus of India."

Numerous meetings followed in different parts of the country, and the Anglo-Indian Defence Association was formed with a fund of over one lakh and fifty thousand rupees, in addition to a monthly income of Rs. 1,000 from members alone, at its disposal. Memorials were sent to the Government. The struggle was carried into England, where a branch of the Defence Association was established. It received powerful journalistic support in *The Times*. It also found support from Lytton and Salisbury. Speaking in the House of Lords, Lord Lytton attacked the Ilbert Bill, warning the House against Ripon's policy of "gradually transferring political power in India from European to Indian hands." The new policy was



striving to introduce into India the restless dissatisfied spirit known as Radicalism. Then, criticising the specific proposal of the Ilbert Bill, Lytton argued in favour of privilege, citing as an illustration the right of a peer to be tried by his fellow peers. Europeans were not the equals but the superiors of the races they governed, he asserted, and went on to claim that Indians themselves recognised this natural inequality.

The main theatre of opposition to the Bill was obviously not in England but in the country of its origin. The "Anglo-Indian" Press denounced the Bill with unexampled fury : the single exception was the *Statesman*, which under the able guidance of Knight boldly supported the measure. Nowhere in India was the opposition so strenuous and powerful as in Bengal, where it had the warm sympathy of the Lieutenant-Governor, Sir Rivers Thompson, an avowed enemy of the policy of Ripon. All the High Court Judges in Calcutta, excepting Mitter, denounced the Bill. The district officers were nearly all against it. The main opposition, however, came from non-official Europeans—lawyers, merchants and indigo planters. Lord Ripon became the subject of abuse and insult; the depth of the hostility to him can be gauged from the fact that a conspiracy was believed to have been set afoot to seize the Viceroy and send him back to England. It was even whispered that the Lieutenant-Governor was in the secret.

Some arguments used against the Bill were really racial in character. It was said that Indians were unfit to try Europeans. But if this allegation was true, they were unfit to discharge all judicial duties; it was not a sound policy to employ good judges for Europeans and bad ones for Indians. Other opponents of the Bill did not ascribe general judicial unfitness to Indian judges, but

argued that owing to their deficient knowledge of English habits and ways of thought Indians were not in a position to do justice to European offenders. Against this argument it was pointed out that ignorance of English habits had not prevented Indian Judges from giving satisfactory decisions in civil cases in which Europeans were concerned, while Indians had also discharged their duties as Presidency Magistrate and High Court Judge without reproach.

In imitation of Anglo-Indian protests, Indian counter-demonstrations took place in many parts of the country. A joint memorial of the British Indian Association, the Indian Association, the National Mahomedan Association and other bodies was presented to the Government.

The counter-agitation was carried into England. It saw the great British Liberal leader, Bright, a man deeply interested in Indian affairs, poring over a file containing various papers on the Ilbert Bill. As Bright read them he became convinced that the clamour against the Bill was an outcome of jealousy (so he said later). And with his characteristic zeal he set the force of his great personality in support of the Indian counter-agitation favouring the Bill.

The Government of India, however, bent before the powerful opposition of the European community. It proposed that jurisdiction over Europeans should be conferred on no Indian officials except District Magistrates and Sessions Judges.

The partial success of their agitation encouraged the Europeans to continue their struggle more strenuously than ever. "The only course open to the Viceroy, the only compromise possible," wrote the *Civil and Military Gazette*, "is his resignation." The fire blazed high, for-

cing the Government to search eagerly for a formula which would reconcile the "Anglo-Indians" to the main principle of the ill-fated Bill. Such a formula it discovered by the end of the year. The principle that no distinction should be made in the powers of the higher officers of different races was to be retained; but European offenders were to be given a new right—that of being tried by a jury the majority of whom would be their own countrymen. In this form the Bill was passed, and it received the assent of the Governor-General.

The Government thus made peace with the "Anglo-Indians" by giving them a new privilege in exchange for an old one. Racial equality within the higher official class was established, but racial inequality among persons brought for trial was maintained. The European offender, however trivial his charge, could still claim to be tried by his own countrymen, forming a majority of the jury, though the Court might be presided over by an Indian District Magistrate. This exclusive privilege was likely to be, as the contemporary barrister Lal Mohan Ghose said, a source of injustice.

After this compromise the storm died away. The Ilbert Bill was, so far as the Anglo-Indians were concerned, merely the match that set ablaze the accumulated gunpowder. Many Anglo-Indians noted Ripon's liberal policy with irritation. It is possible that they regarded the attempt to extend the structure of Local Self-Government as "the first blow struck at their monopoly of power." Certain other matters, though small, created anxiety and anger. Such were, as Bright said, the appointment of R. C. Mitter as the acting Chief Justice of the Calcutta High Court. *The Times* ridiculed the state-

ment, but it is borne out by evidence. It appears that by the beginning of 1883 the Anglo-Indians were prepared for an outburst, and the Ilbert Bill was the climax of a series of measures generally distasteful to them.

The Government of India probably thought that it had retreated with dignity, but Indians thought otherwise. Meetings were held in many parts of the country condemning the "concordat" formed by the Government with the Defence Association. Not that the original Bill itself had been looked upon as a great blessing. Indians had welcomed it merely as an earnest of better things to come. A vernacular journal had spoken the thoughts of a great number of people when it had said : "In truth, did not Mr. Ilbert's Bill hold out hopes regarding the future, we would not even cast a glance on such a small measure." The extraordinary agitation against it was a great surprise. But a greater surprise was yet in store. The files of *The Bengalee* clearly show that Indians were convinced of the inevitable defeat of the Defence Association, and they would not have been so disgusted if they had expected any compromise. The great political lesson derived in 1884-85 was that an engine of opposition could be built up, powerful enough to bend the Government under its pressure.

The Anglo-Indians had challenged the ruling power and gained victory by virtue of an audacity disproportionate to their strength. True, they were fighting a Government composed of their own kinsmen, while political agitation by Indians must start at a disadvantage. But, on the other hand, it could become far more powerful than any Anglo-Indian movement if it could only gather together the whole of the Indian middle-classes. The idea

of such an organisation began to develop rapidly in the Indian mind—the more rapidly since it was felt that even a sympathetic Governor-General could do little by himself; Anglo-Indians might baffle his plans, unless they in turn were counteracted by an Indian organisation. It is significant that within the space of two years after the Ilbert Bill controversy terminated there appeared on the political scene the Indian National Congress.

## A PATRIOT GOES TO PRISON

**P**OLITICAL prosecutions in India have lost the gleam of novelty. There have been too many of them.

Great movements have washed over the country since 1919, and each swell of the tide has flung its victims into the gloom of law courts and the silence of prison cells. Not many cases excite a nation-wide interest; and the few that attack the emotions of the people owe their power to some central personality, or a dramatic content of the events.

It was a different story half a century ago. A tremendous unrest swept the country in 1883 over a petty prosecution. There was nothing in the incident that was of the stuff of drama. Nor was a great personality involved, for Surendranath Banerji, the main interest of this case, had still to make his name. He was already reputed as a journalist and orator, and the Indian Association which he had formed was proving his capacity as a leader. Yet it was not until the hurricane of the anti-partition struggle in Bengal that he stirred the public imagination. The charge against Surendranath Banerji was contempt of Court.

The case arose out of a leaderette in the *Bengalee* containing these words : "We have amongst us a judge, who, if he does not actually recall to mind the days of Jeffreys and Scroggs, has certainly done enough, within

the short time that he has filled the High Court Bench, to show how unworthy he is of his high office, and how by nature he is unfitted to maintain those traditions of dignity which are inseparable from the office of the judge of the highest Court in the land.....Mr. Justice Norris is determined to set the Hooghly on fire. The last act of *zubberdusti* on his Lordship's part was the bringing of a *saligram*, a stone idol, into court for identification..... The presiding deity of a Hindu household had never before this had the honour of being dragged into court. Our Calcutta Daniel looked at the idol and said it could not be a hundred years old. So Mr. Justice Norris is not only versed in Law and Medicine, but is also a connoisseur of Hindu idols.....

“What are we to think of a Judge who is so ignorant of the feelings of the people and so disrespectful of their most cherished convictions, as to drag into court, and then to inspect, an object of worship which only Brahmins are allowed to approach, after purifying themselves according to the forms of their religion? Will the Government of India take notice of such a proceeding? The religious feelings of the people have always been an object of tender care with the Supreme Government. Here, however, we have a judge who, in the name of justice, sets these feelings at defiance and commits what amounts to an act of sacrilege in the estimation of pious Hindus.”

A few days after, on May 2, Surendranath, who was then editing the *Bengalee*, was served with a writ from the High Court to show cause why he should not be committed for contempt of Court. The hearing came up on May 5 before a Full Bench of five Judges. Mr. W. C. Bonnerjea, the leader of the Calcutta Bar, was briefed for the defence. The famous counsel took over the case on the understanding that his client would apologise and

withdraw the comments he had made on the conduct of Mr. Justice Norris. Surendranath agreed on apology, since he had written the article "in a moment of heat and indignation."

Surendranath was prepared for a sentence of conviction. He arrived at the High Court on the appointed day with his bedding and books and all other things that he might require during a period of detention, not forgetting his brush and comb. News about the trial had spread rapidly, and the streets adjoining the Court swarmed with a vast crowd, including a large number of students. The police were also there in strong force, with European officers.

The Court-room also was one dense mass of men. The galleries were full. Never before had the Calcutta High Court attracted so much public interest.

The Judges appeared late on the Bench, at about half past eleven. The accused had been kept waiting in suspense for an hour. Later, it came out that the Judges had held a conference to discuss what sentence was to be passed. Four Judges stood for a sentence of imprisonment. The single dissentient was Mr. Justice Romesh Chunder Mitter who insisted that a fine would suffice, since an apology had been tendered. It seems that the day before the Chief Justice had seen Mitter at his private residence and tried to persuade him to agree with the majority. But Mitter had remained unconvinced. The persuasion was continued at the conference by all the four judges, but Mitter was adamant. He referred to the precedent created in Taylor's case, and insisted that a fine would be sufficient for the ends of justice.

It was urged on behalf of the accused that "his observations were made in perfect good faith, and without any motive of any description whatsoever other than the



motive to promote the public good." The plea having been rejected the Chief Justice read out the judgment on behalf of his European colleagues, sentencing the defendant for two months, and adding that he and his colleagues disagreed with Mr. Justice Mitter. The dissenting Judge then read out his judgment, stating that a gross contempt of Court had been committed, but that in view of the apology tendered the offence called for no greater penalty than the infliction of a fine.

The sentence inflamed the minds of the thousands gathered near the Court House. All eyes were fixed on the prison-van, which was to be the centre of a great demonstration. But the police took the prisoner out by the Judges' entrance, put him in a private carriage and drove off by a roundabout way to the Presidency Jail.

The prisoner was received by the Jail Superintendent with courtesy. The same afternoon Mr. B. L. Gupta, then Presidency Magistrate of Calcutta, called on Surendranath to express his sympathy and to make him as comfortable as possible. On hearing the sentence he had suspended the work of his court and driven off to the jail. Such open sympathy displayed by a high government official became the subject of newspaper comment, implying as it did a tacit disapproval of the sentence passed by the High Court.

The sentence was received with angry disapproval not only in Bengal but all over India. On May 5, Calcutta observed a *hartal*, not by previous arrangement but by a sudden spontaneous decision, and a big demonstration took place. The vast crowds could not be accommodated in the halls so that there were overflow meetings in the open air. The educated classes joined the agitation to voice their anger against an act of injustice.

Public meetings were held in Lahore, Amritsar, Agra, Fyzabad, Poona and other important towns. The same fervour found expression in the Press. The demand for news gave a fresh impetus to journalism, and two-pice papers were started. For the first time the Bengali newspapers counted their subscribers by the thousand. An editorial remark may be quoted from the *Indian Empire* as typical of numerous others. The agitation was "quite unprecedented," the journal said; every hour it "began to swell, till it resembled a wild fire, and spread all over the length and breadth of the vast peninsula, among all shades of creeds and castes... It is no exaggeration to say that there is scarcely any remarkable town in all India that has not echoed the sound of sorrow, sympathy, and indignation; and we are strictly within the limits of truth when we say that there is scarcely an educated community in India that has not contributed its mite to swell the universal chorus; nay, the masses, proverbially inert and indifferent as to the outside world, have spoken and made signs."

It may be mentioned that the *Statesman*, then edited by Robert Knight, wrote a series of articles condemning the sentence passed on Surendranath. When, later, Robert Knight was charged with defamation in proceedings instituted by the Burdwan Raj, a grateful public stood by the English editor and raised a fund for him.

The Calcutta correspondent of *The Times* cabled to his newspaper: "If the agitation goes on increasing as it has been doing for the last three weeks, it will prove a source of serious embarrassment to the Government." (*The Times*, June 4, 1883).

Ananda Mohan Bose, Secretary of the Indian Association, observed in his annual Report: "That 'good cometh out of evil' was never more fully illustrated than

in this notable event. It has now been demonstrated, by the universal outburst of grief and indignation which the event called forth, that the people of the different Indian provinces have learnt to feel for one another, and that a common bond of unity and fellow-feeling is rapidly being established among them."

Yet, the sentence on Surendranath Banerji was by itself a minor incident. The Contempt Case, it seems, was a mere excuse. It supplied a convenient outlet for pent-up feelings. For almost a decade the people's mind had been overheated with excitement. The Ilbert Bill controversy had done its work, and Indians had learnt the value of organized agitation. The Bench of the Calcutta High Court put a spark to a mass of combustible material, so that it burst up in flames.

## AN ARMED MISSION TO LHASA

**T**HE first Englishman who reached Lhasa, the mysterious city of Tibet, was an adventurer named Manning. He went in 1811, without Government assistance, travelling through Bhutan, experiencing severe cold and discomfort, yet spurred onward by a passion to see the uncharted land and the forbidden city. His knowledge of the Chinese language proved indispensable. So perhaps did his beard which excited the admiration of a Chinese Mandarin and won him permission to proceed.

The sacred city disappointed the English traveller. It had "nothing striking, nothing pleasing, in its appearance. The habitations were begrimed with smut and dirt. . . . In short, everything seemed mean and gloomy, and excited the idea of something unreal." One thing alone excited Manning's admiration. It was the Potala, "the lofty, towering palace which forms a majestic mountain of a building." Here he went to pay his respects to the Dalai Lama. He took offerings with him—brass candlesticks (with "two wax candles to make a show"), broadcloth, thirty new bright dollars and as many pieces of zinc, some Smith's lavender-water and a store of Nankin tea. Thrice he bowed before the holy presence, touching the ground with his head. Then he removed his hat, and "humbly gave his clean-shaved head to lay his (the Dalai Lama's) hands upon." He was asked to sit on a

cushion. The Lama's face and manners were beautiful and poetic, he thought.

The Dalai Lama was then a child, about seven years old. As he gazed at the white visitor his smile trembled on the verge of gentle laughter. "No doubt," writes Manning, "my grim beard and spectacles somewhat excited his risibility." "I was extremely affected by this interview with the Lama. I could have wept through strangeness of sensation."

Manning comments bitterly on the refusal of the East India Company's Government to assist him with money and credentials. There were great possibilities of trade with Tibet, which they totally ignored.

It was not until the last quarter of the century that the Bengal Government urged the necessity of improving intercourse with Tibet. The motives were to keep the wild frontier tribes in check, and to find a market for tea, cotton goods and indigo. Negotiations were carried on with the Chinese Government who regarded the Tibetan plateau as their dependency, and a Convention was signed. But the treaty became a scrap of paper. The Tibetans, it seemed, had little use for commerce.

In 1899 Lord Curzon tried to open up direct communications with Tibet. He sent a letter to the Dalai Lama through a Bhutanese agent, but it came back with the seal intact.

While Curzon's letter was brought back unopened, there appeared an announcement in the *Journal de Saint Petersbourg* of October 2, 1900, that His Majesty the Czar had accorded a reception to one Dorojieff, an accredited envoy from the Dalai Lama. Eight months after, a notice was published in the *Odessa Novosti* that Odessa would welcome a diplomatic mission from Lhasa which was travelling to the capital. It was headed by a Lama

named Dorojieff. Clippings from both the papers were despatched to Whitehall by British agents in Russia. It was seen from further press cuttings that Dorojieff was a Russian subject, born in Eastern Siberia, and had lived in Tibet for twenty years. "This reappearance of the Tibet Mission," commented a Russian newspaper, "proved that the favourable impressions carried back by Dorojieff to his home from his previous mission have confirmed the Dalai Lama in his intention of contracting the friendliest relations with Russia..... a rapprochement with Russia must seem to him (the Dalai Lama) the most natural step, as Russia is the only Power able to frustrate the intrigues of Great Britain."

The British Ambassador at St. Petersburg discussed the matter with the Russian Chancellor and was told that the conclusions drawn by the press were false, and that the Tibetan visitors were not charged with any diplomatic mission. But when Dorojieff had an interview with the Czar, the British Ambassador on instructions from Whitehall informed the Russian Chancellor that His Majesty's Government would not permit any disturbance of the existing status of Tibet.

Eleven months later the British Foreign Office was startled by a telegram from its Ambassador at Peking that there were press reports of a secret agreement between Peking and St. Petersburg to the effect that in return for a guarantee of Chinese integrity China would relinquish to Russia its entire interest in Tibet.

If Tibet became a zone of Russian influence, the British would have cause for anxiety, since Indian borders touched Tibet for a thousand miles. There was indeed no fear of invasion across the Himalayan Ranges. Yet, as the British argued, Russia at India's northern doors would be an undesirable neighbour.

The Government of India proposed to send a "Mission," escorted by an armed force, to Lhasa itself, to settle there the outstanding questions of trade and foreign relations. The Home Government approved. The mission was entrusted to the leadership of Colonel Francis Younghusband (so well-known later as organiser of the World Fellowship of Faiths) who had travelled extensively in Central Asia and had a taste for adventure.

When the expedition set foot on Tibetan soil, the Jongpen or Commandant of Khamba Jong (jong being the Tibetan for fort) begged the British officers to go back to their frontiers. In vain. Excitedly he cried: "You may flick a dog once or twice without his biting, but if you tread on his tail, even if he has no teeth, he will turn and try and bite you."

The British were prepared to be bitten, and to bite back with a fatal grip of teeth. So, relentlessly the advance continued through snow and blizzard at an altitude of 16,000 feet. The Tibetans had refused to admit British traders on their soil. They had defeated all attempts at negotiation. British troops would march to Lhasa, the capital, and force the lamas to break their isolation and enter into terms. What if they were intruding on foreign ground against the obligations of moral and international law? They had the right of might. Onward to Lhasa! No war was declared. The Tibetans were told that they would not be harmed if they allowed the troops to proceed to the capital. But the Tibetans had orders not to let the foreigners pass. The first shots were fired at Guru. The Tibetans are a peace-loving race, drugged to inaction by their religious system. After a little fighting they cowered before the rifle fire and fled.

Meanwhile, the Russian Government were anxiously watching the British advance. Whitehall gave them the

assurance that "nothing had happened to modify the objects with which we had originally determined to send Colonel Younghusband's mission into Tibetan territory.....So long as no other Power endeavours to intervene in the affairs of Tibet, they (the British Government) would not attempt either to annex it, or in any way to control its internal administration."

Delegates arrived from Lhasa to discuss terms, and brought with them a letter from His Holiness, the first letter that an Englishman ever received from a Dalai Lama. Addressed "to the Sahib sent by the English Government to settle affairs," dated "the 8th day of the 6th month, Wood Dragon Year," the letter stressed: "It is not well for the establishment of an agreement between the two countries if you come to Lhasa contrary to my wishes."

But the Colonel was set on dictating terms at the capital. The advance was resumed up the valley flanked by snow-clad mountains. At last there loomed the Potala standing on a rocky prominence, etched against the horizon, its gilded roofs shining. The heart of Tibet's political life had been reached. Never before had a European army trodden the dust of the sacred city. But the Dalai Lama had fled. The Ti Rimpoche (Regent) was holding the seals of office and on him and the leading men of Tibet Colonel Younghusband imposed his terms in the audience room at the Dalai Lama's palace. Tibet must come out of its isolation and open trade marts to which all British subjects should have free access. It must pay an indemnity of 75 lakhs in 75 annual instalments, and so long as the sum remained unpaid Britain would hold the Chumbi valley as security. Finally, the Tibetans must undertake that, without the previous consent of the British Government, no portion of Tibetan territory should be



sold, leased, mortgaged or otherwise given for occupation to any Foreign Power, and no agents excepting British should be admitted into Tibet.

It is interesting to note that Younghusband saw two men who had been imprisoned for the assistance they had given to Sarat Chandra Das, the Bengali traveller in Tibet. They had been in chains for 19 years, and showed signs of terrible suffering: sunken cheeks, glazed staring eyes, skin as dry and white as paper, the expression on the face one of fixed horror.

The Dalai Lama's fate may be briefly related. He wandered about in Mongolia and the borders of China for three years. "He sent Dodojieff again to the "great white Czar." Then he arrived at Peking. The Chinese Government received him with honour, but they had mailed fists under velvet gloves. They issued a decree emphasising the Dalai Lama's subordinate position. "The Dalai Lama already, by the Imperial commands of former times, bears the title of the Great, Good, Self-existent Buddha of Heaven. We now expressly confer upon him the addition to his title of the Loyally Submissive Vice-regent, the Great, Good, Self-existent Buddha of Heaven."

The incarnation of Buddha was 35 years old, and had a shaven head, pock-marked face, a small black moustache, large dark-brown eyes, flashing white teeth. He wandered awhile again, and then returned to Lhasa, but the Chinese Government had already made preparations to take the temporal power from his hands. He fled under the cover of night, hotly pursued by Chinese troops, arrived at Darjeeling, and proceeding to Calcutta had an interview with the Viceroy. The British Government would do nothing for him. In a few days the Emperor of China issued a Decree depriving him of his title, and ordering

the search for a successor. So he passes out of history, while yellow robed monks scour the country to find male children bearing miraculous signs. The names of the golden urn, and out of them one is drawn. The child goldren urn, and out of them one is drawn. The child whose name comes out is the re-incarnation of past generations of Dalai Lamas, and assumes the mantle of power as the new Self-existent Buddha of Heaven.

## VIVEKANANDA'S WORLD MISSION

A STRANGE mendicant walked the streets of Upper India in the hot months of 1888. Tall, broad-shouldered, thick-set, he had a wide forehead, a strong jaw, large dark piercing eyes. He wore the saffron garb of an ascetic, and carried a staff, a begging bowl. He was twenty-five.

Some years earlier he had been a student at college, reading avidly, using his amazing intellect to assimilate vast funds of knowledge, but ever restless, bewildered by his own inner hungers, torn within, baffled and at bay. With the other Bengali intellectuals of the time he visited the holy man Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, somewhat sceptic, yet drawn by his bitter soul-storm to seek a place that held the promise of anchorage.

Ramakrishna fascinated him. He had met the mystic of the Kali temple with battle in his eyes. He struggled awhile with the dominating personality, wielding logic like a sword, till argument faded into faith. Then he renounced his home and accepted consecration. There followed a period of self-preparation—the study of philosophy and the meditative way.

Wander-lust seized him then. He felt stifled among the little community of disciples at Baranagore and longed to escape. He left all at once and set out on the highway. Benares, Ayodhya, Agra, Bridaban.....At

Hathras he found a companion. He had reached the railway station, weak with hunger, when Sadananda, the young station-master, saw him and was strangely perturbed by his glance. "I followed two relentless eyes," he said later. He asked the yogi to his house, and when his guest left, he went with him, dressed as a mendicant. Up the heights of the Himalayas they went, and in the silent grandeur and solitude of the white-clad peaks the searchful mind sank into meditative repose.

Some time after he set out on a second journey across Upper India. Great ideas were developing in his mind, among them the Vedantic conception of "Oneness of all," a universal gospel. He felt the pressure of an inward power, a torrent of his own creation that beat upon him for an outlet. In an unguarded moment at Benares he broke into rough words: "I am going away; I shall never come back until I can burst on society like a bomb and make it follow me like a dog." Romain Rolland aptly comments: "He suffered from that excess of power which insists on domination and within him there was a Napoleon."

So he left Baranagore again during the rains of 1890 and stayed away for over six years. The first three were years of wandering, always on foot, from the Himalayas to the Cape. In the Himalayas he lived with Thibetan races. Down in the plains he had contact with criminal tribes. In Central India he lived awhile with sweepers. One day he was a beggar on the street or else sheltered by untouchables, and the next day he was an honoured guest in a Maharaja's palace. His interest in man was as compelling as his interest in God. He was no missionary. He was travelling to see India and to feel India. The poverty and misery he witnessed crystallised the thought: "Religion is not for empty bellies."

He reached Cape Comorin, fatigued, with no money to pay the ferry. But he would not be held back at Land's End. He swam the waters of the strait!

It was in those days that he made a fateful decision. He had now heard of the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago a year later. He decided to take part in it. India had a gift for the West. He would be a conveyor of that precious gift of Advaita philosophy. A friendly Maharaja gave him his passage. At the moment of his departure from India's shores he assumed the name of Vivekananda.

In America he suffered from bitter cold and even starvation. And then it seemed that the long journey would end in disaster. No speaker was to be accepted without official credentials, and of these he, an unknown wanderer, had none. Anyhow, it was already too late for the registration of new speakers.

The difficulties faded unexpectedly. A chance introduction in a railway train brought Vivekananda into contact with a renowned Harvard professor. Fascinated by the young Indian's personality, the professor used his influence to arrange that Vivekananda would represent Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions.

The great assembly opened on September 11, 1893. Vivekananda did not speak until the end of the day. At last he rose, saffron-robed, a great saffron turban on his head. He addressed the vast gathering as "Sisters and Brothers of America!" The informal words were electrical in their effect. Hundreds rose and applauded. Never before had Vivekananda spoken to such an assembly, and unlike the other delegates he used no written text, not even notes. His subject was the Vedantic concept of Advaita, Oneness of all, and "his speech was like a tongue of flame. Among the grey wastes of cold dissertation it

fired the souls of the listening throng." His voice was deep, impassioned, full of beauty and power; it was described later as "an admirable baritone having the vibrations of a Chinese gong."

During the session he spoke about a dozen times. The American press recognized him as "undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions." All at once Vivekananda had risen from obscurity into glory such as no Indian had yet known overseas.

He wept over his victory, Romain Rolland tells us. "Oh Mother," he groaned, "what shall I do with fame when my people are lying in misery?"

He was undeceived by America's outward glitter. In course of his subsequent lecture tour through the United States he often stirred the anger of his audience by laying bare the many evils of Western civilization, the narrowness of spirit and the brutality. He did not spare Christianity either. "Yours is a religion preached in the name of luxury.....Those who call upon Christ care for nothing but to amass riches! Christ would not find a stone on which to lay his head among you.....You are not Christians. Return to Christ!"

When enraged clergymen began to spread base lies about Vivekananda's private life, he laughed them to scorn. An accusation came from his disciples in India that he had eaten beef. His answer was characteristic: "Do you mean to say I am born to live and die one of those caste-ridden, superstitious, hypocritical....cowards ....I belong to India just as much as to the world, no humbug about that." He believed in no other restrictive vows save those of poverty and chastity.

From America he crossed over to Europe. He met Max Muller, Paul Deussen and Margaret Noble. As he returned home in a blaze of publicity, India feted him.

Flowers were strewn on his path. A Rajah drew his carriage. The country was struck with joy and pride that an Indian had imposed himself on the West and become a world personality.

Now it was time to gather the fruits of victory. But Vivekananda was a sick man, marked out by death. Malaria and diabetes had been sapping his vitality for years. Yet he roused himself to a herculean task and laid the foundations of Ramakrishna Mission.

His fight was, in a measure, against age-old traditions. India's yogis had always striven to realise their ideals in meditative inaction. They seemed lost to the outer world. Vivekananda made service the keystone of religious quest. "Your *Bhakti* is sentimental nonsense," he told his brother monks roughly. "Who cares what your scriptures say? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully if I can rouse my countrymen to stand on their feet and be *men* inspired with the spirit of *Karma Yoga*."

He began a whirlwind tour of India. He urged the necessity of ending the poverty of the masses. He preached inter-caste marriage, a better life for Hindu widows, abolition of untouchability. He lashed at the "don't-touchisms" (as he called them) of Hindu society with angry scorn. "Feel, my would-be reformers," he cried, his eyes flashing. "Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions.....have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless?.....Has it made you almost mad?"

Western disciples came to India at his call. Then he set out again for America and Europe to establish branch Missions at different centres. His life was ebbing

fast, but he would not spare himself. He went to Paris as delegate at a Congress of Religions. Eastward through Austria to Constantinople and the Bosphorus, on the shores of which he met some Sufi monks. Then to Athens, to Cairo. Suddenly in Egypt he heard the call of death and hurried home to India. Shattered in health, he yet undertook, because of an inward urge, a journey to Mayavati, the *ashrama* perched on far Himalayan heights. Four days' march through the severe December snow exhausted him utterly. While at Mayavati, he stepped into his thirty-eighth year. He left soon, journeying down the slopes.

Then he lay dying at Belur. Ever since his days of wandering he had drawn heavily on his great balance of physical energy. Even when worn out completely by diabetes, he had willed his body to relentless toil. He had lived intensely and his task was accomplished. "What does it matter?" he cried, as the end was near. "I have done enough for fifteen hundred years!"



## JALLIANWALA BAGH, GRAVEYARD OF AN EMPIRE

“**W**IN *Swaraj* by joining the British army.”

A curious recruiting slogan, this, coming from the mouths of leaders of the Indian National Congress! The World War was gathering velocity. The Allies were out to fight an “Enemy of civilisation.” The fields of Flanders and Mesopotamia cried out for immense masses of men. The war exchequer cried out for immense contributions. And India had an abundance of man-power, India was the brightest jewel on the crown of the British Empire. She must demonstrate her loyalty. She must give freely in gold and gun fodder.

India did. The political leaders declared a truce and went forward to help recruitment. Without their support the Government could not have so easily enlisted 800,000 combatants and 400,000 non-combatants on a voluntary basis. Nor was there any popular objection to India's contribution of between 20 and 30 millions yearly, and a free gift of £100,000,000 to the British exchequer.

Not that India had any ill-will for the Powers of Central Europe. She was striking a bargain for herself. By assisting the British at a time of crisis she would surely win a measure of self-government. Gratitude would work a change of heart, so that Whitehall would invest Indians with a new status. The two races would be drawn to each

other as never before. The World War would write a new chapter in Indian constitutional history. Had not Mr. Asquith declared: "Henceforth Indian questions would have to be approached from a different angle of vision?"

Authority in India thought otherwise. They attempted to turn the clock back. The superiority complex was uproariously at work. The anti-British feeling that swept the country in the spring of 1919 was the result of graceless measures. India was galvanized into life. Then Government tried to crush the new spirit and Sir Michael O'Dwyer recalled the Persian couplet of Sadi:

"A stream can be stopped at its course by a twig,  
Let it flow, and it will drown even an elephant."

An all-India *hartal* was met at Delhi by rifle fire. Fuel was added to flames. There followed, a week later, on *Satyagraha* day (April 6), a complete hartal unparalleled in India. Hindus fraternised with Muslims. "Down with the Rowlatt Act," was the cry. Huge crowds carrying black flags paraded the streets. The demonstration was an emphatic but peaceful assertion of the people's will.

The atmosphere was saturated with emotion. Hearts were bitter. Eyes blazed with anger. The Punjab Government did not try to avert the crisis, but goaded the people more and more into fury, till something snapped within them and they became possessed by a lust for violence. A statement of Raizada Bhagat Ram may be quoted: "After the meeting (of the Punjab Legislative Council) I met the Lieutenant-Governor in the drawing room. He asked what sort of a hartal we had at Jullundar. I replied it was a complete hartal, and that there was no disturbance. Sir Michael O'Dwyer asked me what I attributed it to. I answered, 'To my mind it was due to the Soul-force of Mr. Gandhi.' On this, Sir Michael

raised his fist and said, 'Raizada Sahib, remember, there is another force greater than Gandhi's soul force.' " Sir Michael O'Dwyer had made a symbolic gesture! It spoke more than mere words.

At one time there were no more than 15,000 British soldiers garrisoned in this country. The majority of higher civil posts were in Indian hands. Britain had in effect made a voluntary abdication. Never was there a better moment for the kindling of a movement for independence. But Congress was unwavering in loyalty. It had unquestioning faith. Indian freedom was to be won on the shell-scarred flanks of the Hindenburg line!

The first signs of reaction came in 1916. Was the British Cabinet indifferent to India's dreams? Why was there no Royal Proclamation? Then Mr. Montague came out on a visit, and he claimed later that his cold-weather tour kept the country quiet at a critical period of the War. But the Montague-Chelmsford Report issued subsequently took India by surprise. A broken pledge (was there ever a pledge? Whitehall wondered), an act of unsurpassed ingratitude. Was it for this spider web of checks and balances, the testimony of a rooted lack of trust, that India had bled herself in the World War? The Congress leaders and even many Moderates thought they had been basely tricked. To make the situation infinitely worse, on the heels of the Montague-Chelmsford Report came the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee, speedily embodied into two Bills. It was a new penal instrument, entitling judges to try political cases in certain areas without a jury, and arming Provincial Governments with powers of internment.

So, that was the reward! Repression, not reform. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his autobiography: "To-day, fifteen years later, we have any number of laws

.....which are far harsher than the Rowlatt Bills were. Compared to these new laws and ordinances, under which we now enjoy the blessings of British Rule, the Rowlatt Bills might almost be considered a charter of liberty. There is this difference of course; since 1919 we have had a large instalment of what is called self-government, known as the Montague-Chelmsford scheme, and now we are told that we are on the verge of another big instalment. We progress." But coming at the end of the World War amid a crash of disillusion, the Rowlatt Bills made a tremendous impression.

British officials, back to their posts in India, looked upon the War as a mere interlude, and started to restore pre-1914 conditions. They could not understand the growth of the new sentiments.

Earlier that day Sir Michael, witty as ever, and fond of quoting words of wisdom, had reminded his Legislative Council of Lincoln's famous remark: "You can (if you are very clever and very unscrupulous) deceive all the people for some time, and some people for all time. But you cannot deceive all the people for all time." What if the Indian Members in their confused state of mind wondered who the real deceiver was, and thought that Sir Michael was quoting Lincoln against his own Government?

The outbreak at Amritsar.....Sir Michael admits in his book of memoirs ("India As I Knew It"), was undoubtedly precipitated on 10th April by the deportation that morning of the arch-seditionists, Kitchlew and Satyapal." Yet some days earlier Dr. Kitchlew had thus advised an audience of 30,000 who were in no peaceful mood: "The message of Mahatma Gandhi has been read to you. All countrymen should become prepared for resistance. This does not mean this sacred town or country should be flooded with blood. The resistance

should be a passive one.....Do not cause pain or distress to any one. Go home peacefully.....Do not use harsh words in respect of any policeman or traitor, which might cause him pain, or lead to the possibility of a breach of the peace or a riot."

Meanwhile, the one man who could have checked an outbreak was prohibited from entering into the Punjab. Gandhiji was served with the order at a railway station and had to go back to Bombay. The scene was set for a bloody upheaval.

On April 10 the news of the two leaders' deportation spread through Amritsar like lightning. A crowd assembled quickly and made for the Deputy Commissioner's bungalow to plead for their release. Peacefully it marched through the streets, but at a railway overbridge they were stopped by a military picket. They demanded the right of way, saying that they wanted to go to the Deputy Commissioner to make a *faryad*—a prayer. As they pushed forward, the military fired. "Whereon the crowd fell back," says a Congress Committee Report signed by Gandhiji, C. R. Das, Abbas Tyabji and Jayakar. "It was now no longer a peaceful crowd. It was a crowd foiled in its effort to secure the release of its leaders and exasperated at the wounding and the killing of some of its members. These enraged men went to the Railway foot-bridge and some to the Hall Bazar, carrying the killed and the wounded. The sight.....inflamed the citizens who saw them. Within a short time a large crowd was again seen near the carriage overbridge and the foot-bridge. This time it had armed itself with sticks and pieces of wood. Both the bridges were guarded by the military."

The rifles barked. The maddened mob fell back into the city and started an orgy of incendiarism and murder. The vicious circle was completed.

Then General Dyer commanding 45th Brigade came over from Jullundar, established his headquarters at Rambagh, and took over control.

On the morning of 13th April, the General issued a proclamation to the beating of drums. "No procession of any kind is permitted to parade the city.....any time. Any such procession or gathering of four men will be looked upon and treated as an unlawful assembly and dispersed by force of arms, if necessary." The proclamation was read only in some parts of the city, and there is evidence that many citizens of Amritsar knew nothing of it. The 13th April was the *Baisakhi*, the Hindu New Year's Day, and the stream of villagers entering the town on the festive occasion might not have heard of the proclamation.

About the same time a boy passed down the streets of Amritsar, beating a tin can and announcing that a meeting would be held at 4-30 p.m. at Jallianwala Bagh. General Dyer received the news, and started to organise his force. He marched out with a detachment and two armoured cars and reached the Bagh at about 5 o'clock.

Jallianwala Bagh is a waste land, quadrangular, completely enclosed by the back walls of houses, and "resembling a very large sunken swimming bath with perpendicular sides." Three trees stand on the ground, and a dilapidated tomb. The main entrance is a narrow passage. There are no other regular entrances, but only narrow openings at four or five points.

General Dyer marched in and immediately, without giving any warning, he opened fire. The panic-stricken crowd rushed for the exits, scrambling to escape. Many were trampled underfoot. Blood poured in profusion. Heaps of dead and wounded lay tumbled in the dust. General Dyer directed the fire where the crowd was thick-

est, specially at the exits. He fired 1,650 rounds and withdrew only when his ammunition was exhausted. The casualties were officially estimated at 379, and of these 87 were villagers. The wounded numbered at least 1,200, and were left lying in agony, without medical aid.

Sir Michael O'Dwyer, Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, approved of Dyer's action. On the following day he sent aeroplanes to drop bombs on the citizens of Gujranwala and to turn a machine gun on them. He has defended his action on the plea of impending rebellion. But the Hunter Committee, concluded that there was no evidence "to show that the outbreak in the Punjab was part of a pre-arranged conspiracy to overthrow the British Government in India by force."

The shooting at Jallianwala Bagh has been described by C. F. Andrews and others as a "massacre." The horror it evoked is too fresh to be detailed further. Its historical significance has been put in a nut-shell by Edward Thompson: "The bitterness aroused over this controversy has had a marked effect on recent Indian history. It formed a turning point in Indo-British relations almost as important as the Mutiny."

The subsequent action of Dyer was no less remarkable. He proclaimed Martial Law which lasted from 5th April to 9th June. He gave orders deeply humiliating to Indians. Severe flogging in public was the punishment assigned for failure to salaam a Commissioned officer, for disrespect to a European and other similar offences. But the most ingenious insult devised by Dyer was the "crawling order." Every Indian passing through a certain lane had to go on hand and knee, the whole motion to be performed by movements of the belly and arms, under the threat of rifle butts.

Dyer justified his shooting thus in his evidence before the Hunter Committee: "I fired and continued to fire until the crowd dispersed, and I consider this is the least amount of firing which would produce the necessary moral and widespread effect it was my duty to produce if I was to justify my action. If more troops had been at hand the casualties would have been greater in proportion. It was no longer a question of merely dispersing the crowd, but one of producing a sufficient moral effect from a military point of view not only on those who were present, but more especially throughout the Punjab."

The heroes of the Jallianwala Bagh shooting were "thrown to the wolves" (in Sir Michael's phrase). At first Government seemed to bless Dyer's action. But the resistless pressure of public opinion had its effect. Dyer was ordered to resign his commission.

Sir Michael carried to England his campaign against this "injustice." He sought an audience with Lloyd George's Secretary, but the gentleman was too busy conferring with Michael Collins, the Irish rebel, to see him. Sir Michael, unhappy man, commented sadly in a letter that if he had been a successful organiser of rebellion the doors of Downing Street would have opened before him.

But it was not long before the General had "justice." A public subscription was started for him and brought in £30,000. It was, however, left to a British Judge to remove all stain from the General's fair name. The occasion was a libel suit brought against Sir Sankaran Nair who had charged Sir Michael with having committed "atrocities" in the Punjab. "With a solemnity which thrilled the crowded Court" (so we are told) "the Judge spoke with the voice of justice: 'I express my view that



General Dyer, in the grave and exceptional circumstances, acted rightly, and in my opinion, upon the evidence, he was wrongly punished by the Secretary of State for India.' ” “Truth had at last been established,” Sir Michael comments with joy. “British justice had triumphed, a cruel wrong had been righted.”

## THE SUPREME MOMENT

(A Postscript)

**L**ONG years ago we made a tryst with destiny, and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially."

A deepening night of mid-August. Jawaharlal Nehru addresses the Constituent Assembly of India in session at the capital. And as he speaks, a proud empire passes away and a new world force rises, a great people's republic comes into being. India is re-born.

"At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance. It is fitting that at this solemn moment we take the pledge of dedication to the service of India and her people and to the still larger cause of humanity.

"At the dawn of history India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and the grandeur of her successes and her failures. Through good and ill fortunes alike she has never lost sight of that quest or forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. We end today a period of ill fortune and India discovers herself again. The achievement we celebrate

today is but a step, an opening of opportunity, to the greater triumphs and achievements that await us. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future ?

“ Freedom and power bring responsibility. That responsibility rests upon this Assembly, a sovereign body representing the sovereign people of India. Before the birth of freedom we have endured all the pains of labour and our hearts are heavy with the memory of this sorrow. Some of those pains continue even now. Nevertheless the past is over and it is the future that beckons to us now.

“ That future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving so that we might fulfil the pledges we have so often taken and the one we shall take today. The service of India means the service of the millions who suffer. It means the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity. The ambition of the greatest man of our generation has been to wipe every tear from every eye. That may be beyond us but so long as there are tears and suffering, so long our work will not be over.

“ And so we have to labour and to work and work hard to give reality to our dreams. Those dreams are for India, but they are also for the world, for all the nations and peoples are too closely knit together today for any one of them to imagine that it can live apart. Peace has been said to be indivisible, so is freedom, so is prosperity now, and so also is disaster in this one world that can no longer be split into isolated fragments.

“ To the people of India whose representatives we are, we make appeal to join us with faith and confidence in the great adventure. This is no time for petty and destructive criticism, no time for ill-will or blaming

others. We have to build the noble mansion of free India where all her children may dwell."

Jawaharlal Nehru proceeds to move his Resolution, and as the chime of midnight sounds in the Hall of the Assembly and all at once conches pour forth a propitious note, the members rise to their feet and with bowed heads take the pledge :

" At this solemn moment when the people of India, through suffering and sacrifice, have secured freedom, I ..... a member of the Constituent Assembly of India, do dedicate myself in all humility to the service of India and her people to the end that this ancient land attain her rightful place in the world and make her full and willing contribution to the promotion of world peace and the welfare of mankind."

So the Indian cavalcade in its aureole of vivid history divides itself at the supreme moment and the twain on their separate paths move on towards blue horizons ahead. The freedom to be Free. . . . The challenge of the future. . . . The tryst with destiny.

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